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JOE LOUIS:  
*AMERICAN*

*The dignity of the man is enormous and goodness envelops him. In all the years he has been standing under the spotlight in a profession that, to say the least, is smelly, he has never once failed to make the proper gesture or find the correct words, even in the days when he was, strictly speaking, inarticulate. He always has been profoundly conscious of his role as a public character and a representative of his race.*

AL LANEY

The New York Herald Tribune  
October 11, 1944

JOE LOUIS:  
*AMERICAN*

*BY*  
Margery Mille

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**FIRST EDITION**

**DESIGNED BY JEROME MULCAHY**

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***THIS BOOK***  
***Is Dedicated to***  
***NAT FLEISCHER***





The author expresses gratitude to Caswell Adams, of King Features Syndicate, Gloria Bradley, of the Council for Democracy, and Edith C. Johnson, professor of English at Wellesley College, for their assistance in the gathering and assembling of the material which appears in *Joe Louis: American*.



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JOE LOUIS:  
*AMERICAN*



## 1. The Tall Oak

CELEBRITIES FROM THE POLITICAL, STAGE, SCREEN, and radio worlds gathered in Madison Square Garden one March night in 1942 to participate in a show for the benefit of the Navy Relief Society. They had in common the facility of speech necessary to their professions and a sincere desire to help their country win her great struggle against aggressor nations.

In the course of the evening, one after another of them was called upon to speak. The big crowd was appreciative of the things they said, for the speeches, ranging from the serious to the comic, were all good. They were, for the most part, concerned with the war, and what it meant to be an American. Joe Louis, world's heavyweight champion, sat in the crowd that night and applauded with the rest. Although he boasted little education and his grammar was not of the best, he had been warned that he might be asked to speak. His secretary had inquired, "You want me to write out something for you, Joe?" But Joe had answered, "No. If I get up there, I guess I'll just naturally say what I feel."

When the announcer said, "I present to you Joe

Louis, world's heavyweight boxing champion," Joe made his way to the speaker's platform. As he stood in front of the microphone, dressed in the uniform of a United States soldier, a hush fell over the audience. Joe raised his eyes and, looking directly at the great silent crowd in front of him, said, "We all got to do our part, and then we'll win. 'Cause we're on God's side."

A newspaper reporter from one of New York's dailies turned to a colleague in the press row. "Has anybody ever put it like that before?" he asked.

"Not that I know of. They say, 'God's on our side.' But that's different."

The speeches of the other celebrities that evening have been forgotten. But Joe Louis' two sentences still live in a poem written about them by Carl Byoir and in the hearts of many who heard the champion speak them.

People have been prompted to ask, What is he really like, this Joe Louis who is a Brown Bomber in the ring and who ranges himself on God's side outside of it?

Joe Louis is not a paradox. Inside the ring he is intelligent, sincere, honest, and a gentleman. He is exactly the same outside of the ring. It would be ridiculous to paint Joe as a paragon of virtue. He has his share of faults. He is easy-going to a degree which has, in the past, brought embarrassment and trouble to himself and a great deal of anguish to his relatives and friends. His over-fondness for sleep and



food has provided many a laugh for sports reporters covering his training camps. His manners are not quite polished. Yet the qualities which have made him stand out both as a fighter and a man are mostly desirable ones.

Louis' ring brains are evident even to the uninitiated few. Joe does not charge out at the opening gong and try to smother his opponent with a fusillade of blows. His movements in the first minutes of a fight are usually cautious. He takes time to figure out his opponent, to find his weaknesses, and to plan his battle in a way that will take advantage of them. After knocking out Billy Conn in the thirteenth round, he explained to reporters that he had been waiting all evening for Billy to lose his head and leave himself open. "I figured once he got mad, he'd forget himself. So I just waited for that opening."

Joe's maneuvering of Max Baer also showed the method behind Louis' punching. Toward the end of the second round, Louis began working his way back to his own corner and the unwary Baer followed him, sparring. When the bell rang, Louis had only to sit down. Max, a much more experienced athlete, had to walk across the ring to his stool. Joe has learned to make every movement count in the ring. He realizes energy is precious. When he expends it, he does so for a purpose. His every action is planned to speed up the defeat of his opponent. As a boxing fan once remarked, "Joe always acts like

he's fixing to catch that early train back home to Chicago."

For some time, reporters doubted that the intelligence Joe showed in the ring was more than native shrewdness which the champion was able to apply in his athletic contests. Joe's poker face, coupled with his early tendency to say nothing for fear of saying the wrong thing, convinced a good many people that outside of the ring Louis was little more than a moron. Reporters began to change their opinion in respect to Louis' mentality when his witticisms became too frequent and much too pointed to be accidents. One of Joe's first jokes which was recognized as intentional came, oddly enough, shortly after the 1936 Schmeling bout, in which the present champion absorbed an unmerciful beating. "Have you seen the pictures of the fight, Joe?" asked a bright reporter. "No," replied Louis, "I saw the fight."

When Louis lost his fear that the white sports writers, whose business it was to interview him, would misinterpret or ridicule his speech, which was ungrammatical and limited in vocabulary, he talked more. Confronted suddenly by microphones after fights and at his training camps, he always managed to do a fair job of ad libbing. By now he has established himself as a man who makes a good deal of sense when he speaks. The champion is not a genius; but he certainly is nobody's fool.

Joe's sincerity has become proverbial. He has never, for any sum of money or for the sake of effect,

uttered words which he did not mean. Interviewed in the ring after his bouts, he gives an honest appraisal of his own efforts and those of his opponent. If he thinks he did poorly, he says so. If he thinks his opponent made him look foolish, he also says so. To the announcer who asked Joe whether Tony Galento had hurt him, Louis replied, "Well, he knocked me down." After Arturo Godoy had succeeded in bewildering the champion for fifteen rounds with his crouching tactics, Louis disgustedly told reporters that the bout had been his "worstest." Outside of the ring Joe's sincerity is just as much in evidence. The articles which appear in print with the Louis by-line are dictated by Louis. A writer puts Joe's ideas into grammatical form. But no writer is ever permitted to print as Joe's ideas things that are not. No radio script writer has persuaded Joe to say anything he did not believe for the sake of publicity or effect. Joe is far from loquacious. But the words he does speak mean something. As Bill Cunningham, the sports writer, wrote, "When Louis says it, it sticks."

Joe has refused, from the beginning of his career, to make any compromise with honesty either as a boxer or as citizen Joe Barrow. When he agreed to fight under the promotion of Mike Jacobs after he had gained the spotlight, he did so with the understanding that Jacobs would never ask him to do less than his best in the ring. Joe never stalls to increase the value of the radio and film rights to a bout. He

has never tried to fool any of the public any of the time. In private life he is also scrupulously honest. He pays his debts, monetary and otherwise, with cheerfulness and precision.

Caswell Adams of King Features Syndicate once expressed his opinion of Louis. Mr. Adams knows Joe as few white men do, having covered his bouts since 1935 and having talked and been with him informally many times. Unhesitatingly he says, "First of all, he's a gentleman." Joe's modesty is one of the qualities which have caused those who know him to agree with Mr. Adams. There has never been anything of the show-off in Louis when he is in the ring. He doesn't strut and swagger, shake hands with himself, or show in any way that he thinks well of himself or ill of his opponent. Indeed, for all the enthusiasm he shows, he might be at a funeral. Away from the ring his modesty is also apparent. Joe once said, "I'm so lucky I'll never stop being grateful." He is apt to ascribe his success to luck rather than to anything he has been or done. It is very difficult to engage him in conversation about his own achievements. Grantland Rice once complained that such attempts on his part invariably were turned aside by Joe in favor of other subjects—baseball, motion pictures, or music. "Can't talk about me and boxing all the time," says Louis. "There's lots of things interesting to talk about."

Joe's sportsmanship has gained him a host of admirers. In his own words, Joe tries "to win good and

lose good." He has fought everyone who wanted to fight him, and has fought fairly. He has been hit after the bell, and has failed to strike back. He has been sneered at and insulted by opponents, and has ignored them. Although he might have complained legitimately to the referee numerous times when he was fouled, he never did so. Boxing is the business of the champion, but Joe has never let himself forget the fact that it is also a sport. Sparring partners at his training camps learned early that Joe did not appreciate practical jokes played upon animals. "The animal, he don't know what it's all about. He's just scared. And he can't talk back to you, or fight back, usually. You've got to think about them things," Joe said.

## 2. The Acorn

DEEP IN THE BUCKALEW MOUNTAIN REGION OF ALABAMA, in a tiny cabin, a seventh child was born to Munroe and Lillie (Reese) Barrow, May 13, 1914. He was named Joe Louis Barrow.

Big Mun Barrow did not experience unmixed joy at the arrival of his new son. Living in the Buckalew country was hard, and he couldn't foresee a life for Joe different from the one he himself had known, filled, as it was, with work and worry. The wheat, cotton, and vegetables, which Mun raised with Lillie's help, were not enough to support his family comfortably. The Barrows were hungry most of the time. They went shoeless and were dressed in tatters. Their house stood on a 120-acre tract of stubborn, rocky soil which they had rented four years previously. It had been much too small for six children. And now, a seventh. . .

Joe Louis' people were and are a proud, independent lot. Like the majority of the folk in America we call Negroes, they are a blend of three races—the black, the white, and the red. One of Louis' great-great-grandfathers on his father's side of the family was James Barrow, a white planter in pre-

Civil War days, who is reputed to have owned thousands of acres of land and hundreds of slaves. Another great-great-grandfather, Charles Hunkerfoot, was a full-blooded Cherokee chieftain. Hunkerfoot was the type of man about whom legends are woven; strange stories of his remarkable exploits have been passed from generation to generation of Alabama's hill-dwelling people.

Both the white slave-owner and the Indian chief had children by slave women.

A brief study of pictures of the Barrows is enough to convince anyone that they represent a racial blend. Among Joe's aunts, uncles, and cousins in Alabama are to be found brown, blue, and black eyes; straight, wavy, and kinky hair; black, brown, and straw-colored hair; and skins varying in color from near-black to white. Louis himself is tan colored. His hair is kinky and his lips thick. But his eyes are those of an Indian. Most of the Barrows have been able, for a good many years, to say that they are land-owners. But none of those in Alabama have had much of the proceeds from their farms left over after paying their taxes. Joe Louis was the first of the clan to make a lot of money. And he did so after leaving Alabama.

Mun Barrow was not a well man when his seventh child was born. He spent each day working hard in order to exact the maximum returns from his poor farm. And while he worked he continued to worry, fearful that the needs of his increasing family would

so far exceed what he could offer them that disaster would result. Gradually his 190-pound, six-foot, three-inch body was weakened. Mun began to suffer periods of illness, when the world seemed grotesque and alien to him. These periods increased in frequency until, when Joe Louis was only two years old, Sheriff J. W. Lane of Chambers County came and took Mun away. He placed him in the state institution near Mobile.

By this time there were eight Barrow children. Lillie, a plump, motherly woman, had a strong body and a great determination to keep her family together. Now she had to do Mun's work besides her own. Ploughing, ditching, cutting cordwood—all these activities became part of her daily work. Always noted for her ability to beat the "menfolk" at some of their most rugged games, she now put some of her precious reserve of energy to work for herself and her brood.

Lillie had then, as she has now, a philosophy of life which might be summed up as "trust in God, work hard, and hope for the best." While Lillie was trusting, working, and hoping, little Joe found a great deal around him to command his interest. He did not lack playmates. Not only were his six older brothers and sisters always ready for fun after they had finished working in the fields, but a lively bunch of neighbors' children made the welkin ring from morning until night.

At first, Joe was a frail baby. Through his growing



years he gained strength by sleeping a great deal—an average, his mother estimates, of fourteen hours a day. By the time he was four years old, he was errand boy for the family. One of his earliest memories is that of being given a basket full of fried chicken by his mother, to be delivered to his older brothers, who were picking cotton in the fields. "After I got out of sight of the house," Joe says, "I wanted powerful bad to lift up the cover on that basket. I wasn't going to do anything wrong—just look at the chicken and maybe smell it, 'cause it was warm and I knew it would smell good. So I lifted up the cover and looked inside. Oh, my, how good that smelled! I sat down under a shade tree, and I really got to work on that chicken. When I got to the fields and my brothers saw what I had done, they whipped me good. But it was worth it."

As Joe grew, he learned the games that mountain children play, which gradually built up his body. "Skin a tree" was his favorite pastime during early childhood. It was played by about a dozen boys, one of whom would be "it." The fellow whose turn it was would stand in an appointed place, close his eyes, and count to ten. Meanwhile, each of his playmates headed for a supple young sapling and shinned up it as fast as he could. The first one the "it" boy caught, after finishing his count, would then have to count to ten, and so forth.

"The thing to remember," Joe says, "was always to get a slim young tree that would bend with your

weight but not break. 'Cause then you could always shin to the top, and if you were fast enough, have time for the tree top to bend so you'd reach the ground again before the 'it' boy was halfway up the tree."

Games like "skin a tree" developed Joe Louis' young muscles, particularly his shoulder muscles, in a way to make them just right for boxing. The muscles in Louis' body are long, loose, and quick-moving. There is nothing of the muscle-bound athlete about Joe. His body was not over-exercised. Moreover, he says, "The games we kids made up down there were good training. You had to think fast and move fast. Later, when I got to Detroit, I was glad I had that backwoods boyhood. We did so many things, I found I could catch on to most any game easy. Always the Detroit games had some of our Buckalew games in them."

Joe Louis began school in Alabama. He has since shown himself both anxious and able to learn. But in the Buckalew region, school was not the system that it was in the Northern states. Joe and his friends attended some of the time, learned a few things, and considered, as apparently the school authorities did too, that this was all that could be expected of them. Later Joe was to deplore this early lack of schooling. A sports writer has quoted him as saying, "I'm mighty glad to be champion, and I've been powerful lucky to get where I am. But I sure wish I'd started in a good school like the kids up North do, and gone

regularly. I'd sure like to be a smart man—more'n anything else, I guess."

Every Sunday Lillie Barrow scrubbed her brood, put them into the least tattered clothes available, and marched them off to the nearest Baptist church. "The roads were rough and rutty," Joe Louis recalls. "But I guess it done us good, even if we had to walk quite a few miles both ways. Ma never would let us get out of church. I reckon she figured the most she had time to do for all of us was teach us the difference between right and wrong."

Mrs. Barrow did a good job of teaching Joe that difference. His honesty is proverbial and extends to the smallest details of his daily living. Louis is the first heavyweight champion to refuse to endorse products he does not actually use. He has, for example, been offered tremendous sums to endorse various brands of cigars. But he has always politely insisted, "I'm sorry, but I don't smoke."

Not very long after Mun Barrow had been taken to the state institution, word drifted back to the Barrows that he had died. Travel over the country roads was slow, and the news, it was reasonable to assume, had been delayed for some time in reaching them. Lillie knew, when she heard it, that Mun would have been buried already. She had little reason to doubt the news. Mun had deteriorated physically, as well as mentally, at the time he was taken from his home. Lillie, more than ever, was determined to "trust in God, work hard, and hope for the

best." She could hardly guess that someone—perhaps the authorities in the institution, perhaps the bringer of the news—had made a terrible mistake. Mun Barrow, mentally disordered and ignorant of the prominence his son came to attain, actually lived on many more years. Not until Louis had become world's champion did Sheriff Lane, who had originally taken him to the institution, shock both the hospital authorities and the Barrow family by identifying the man as Joe Louis' father.

Lillie, harassed by the thousand worries that attended her daily struggle to keep her family fed and clothed, met, within a few years of Mun's reported death, a widower named Pat Brooks, who offered to marry her. She accepted the offer. This was one of the great turning points in Joe Louis' life, for Pat Brooks was obsessed with the idea of leaving Alabama and finding a better life in the North. He talked with Lillie about it, and she finally agreed to his leaving for Detroit. There Joe Louis' stepfather got a job in the Ford plant and began saving his money. He had saved enough, by the time Joe was ten years old, to send for his large family.

Lillie went about leaving Alabama with the quiet efficiency that had always marked her actions. She got together her few belongings and sold them. With the proceeds added to the money Pat had sent, she bought nine tickets to Detroit and to a life which was to be entirely different from the one she had always known.

### 3. Joe Begins His Climb

A CROWDED TENEMENT HOUSE ON MADISON AVENUE was the first home the Barrows had in Detroit. It was, if anything, less comfortable than the cabin they had left in Alabama. But none of them complained. They adapted themselves with comparative ease to the life of the Northern city.

Joe attended the Duffield School, where, he was dismayed to discover, his lack of good schooling in Alabama put him at a considerable disadvantage. Big for his years, he felt his size was accentuated when the school authorities, in consideration of the rural training he had had, put him a year behind other children of his age. He was troubled and confused to be faced suddenly with facts he should have learned but had never even heard about. At first school seemed a hopeless jumble. Joe's pronounced Southern accent and the strange jargon he had learned to use in the Buckalew country complicated matters further. It was not very easy to make himself understood.

After school, however, things were different. He was on an equal footing with his classmates at play, if not at books. Like almost every boy of his age in

the poorer sections of the city, he had his gang. They ran the streets playing the new games Joe had learned in the city to use up their surplus energy. One of Joe's pals and classmates was Thurston McKinney, who later was to become famous as the man who started Louis on his amateur career. But the Barrows were having a hard time making ends meet. Joe gave up a lot of his after-school fun when he was twelve to take a job delivering ice. The dollar a week he earned was an important item in Lillie's budget. Things looked black. During those hard early days only an unexpected boon enabled the Barrows to get by. By applying to the Detroit Welfare Board they were able to secure \$269, paid to them over a period of seven months. It hurt Lillie's pride to accept charity, even for the sake of feeding and clothing her brood. Not until 1935 was she reconciled to accepting the Welfare Board's gift. Then Joe Louis, who had become the most sensational heavyweight since the great Dempsey, wrote out a check for \$269 to the Board in repayment. And he accompanied it with the heartfelt thanks of the Barrows.

Joe, discouraged with grade school, gave it up after he had completed the seventh grade, and was enrolled in the Bronson Vocational School. Here he studied cabinet-making, but he was unable to work up much enthusiasm for it. The sort of thing that was taught in the grade school he had just left appealed to him much more. He felt, however, that it

would take time to grasp fully the fundamentals of learning which the Alabama school had only partially taught, and even more time to build the kind of knowledge around them that would be necessary if he were to become really good at book learning. He didn't have that time. He thought that if he could learn a trade that would bring in money, he would be doing the thing best calculated to help his family out of its precarious financial state. Cabinet-making, he thought, might be such a trade.

While Joe was at the Bronson School, he was spending his spare time with Holman Williams, a boy next door. Holman owned a pair of boxing gloves and was rapidly developing a good deal of skill in the use of them. Joe, who had been the catcher on his grade school baseball team, was soon boxing with his friend in the latter's back yard. At first he did not take to boxing so easily as he had to baseball, which he had learned to love. Many was the time that he had wished the major baseball leagues would admit Negroes to their teams. But, as he began studying the swift movements and beautiful footwork that Holman possessed, he saw there was more to this boxing business than he had at first imagined. It was an interesting game—guessing what the swift shadow in front of him was going to try next, and deciding, in a split second, how he might best be foiled.

Meanwhile, Lillie Barrow had decided upon the career she wanted her youngest son to follow. Mu-

sicians, she knew, sometimes made as much as thirty-five dollars a week—a tremendous sum. And Lillie had always loved music. At some sacrifice, she purchased a violin and arranged for Joe to take weekly lessons. Louis, to please his mother, went dutifully to his music teacher with what was, to him, monotonous regularity. He did not lack an appreciation for music—Lillie had been right in that. But his fondness for it sprang mostly from the sense of rhythm that guided his every movement. Drums might have suited him better. When out of his mother's sight, he strummed the violin instead of using the bow.

Trade school ended rather happily. His teacher, more of a prophet than he himself could then imagine, had written on Joe's report card, "Good in manual training. This boy some day should be able to do something with his hands." Still, Joe's future didn't look very bright. He could not know that a recent happy accident was to prove a turning point of his young life. One day in 1931 while walking down the street with the violin tucked under his arm, heading for his weekly lesson, he had met Thurston McKinney, his former classmate in grade school.

"What you got there?" asked Thurston.

"A violin. I'm going to take a lesson."

"Oh, come on, Joe. Just skip the lesson this once. You can do me a big favor."

McKinney had become amateur lightweight boxing champion of Michigan since Joe had been in



school with him, and was a celebrity in the neighborhood. Louis listened to Thurston's pleadings with the attention such a remarkable young man deserved. Thurston, it seemed, was desperate. He had to condition himself for a bout, but could find no one to spar with. Joe, whose ice-carrying had developed his shoulder muscles and whose experiences with Holman Williams had taught him the fundamentals of boxing, looked as if he might fill in fairly well. Would he, would he *please*, help a fellow in distress?

Joe would. He accompanied Thurston to Brewster's East Side Gymnasium, where the amateur club to which McKinney belonged held sway. McKinney made him very uncomfortable in the first few minutes of their bout. Louis was, after all, abysmally ignorant of the finer points of boxing. Thurston's jab found Joe's mouth with discouraging regularity. But then Thurston made a mistake—and launched Joe Louis on his career. He took advantage of Joe's inexperience and crashed a hard right hand to the jaw. Something happened which seldom happens to Joe. He became angry. Instinctively, he struck back with his own right, and was astounded to see Thurston stagger and start to fall. Louis, his anger gone, stepped in at once and held his opponent up. But the light had dawned.

"I could have knocked him out," Joe kept telling himself after the bout was over. "He's the champ of the whole state, and I could have knocked him out."

The next day Joe did two significant things: He told his mother that he was through with the violin; and he joined the Brewster Center boxing club. He had become a boy with a purpose. Lillie at first protested. But, after thinking it over, she decided to keep her peace. Some day, her boy would come home with his face cut and his eyes blackened, and that would finish it. Joe was now working as a lathe operator in the Briggs Automobile Factory for a dollar a day. Lillie only hoped that, if he wouldn't be a violinist, he might get a better-paying job in the factory, settle down to it, and forget this crazy boxing business.

Lillie was right about Joe's getting a bad pounding in the ring. Toward the end of 1932, the trainer at his club decided Louis was good enough to enter a tournament, to be held at the Edison Athletic Club. Joe, then a light heavyweight, was dismally overmatched. His opponent was Johnny Miler, holder of several amateur titles and so good he had been selected to represent this country at the Olympics, held a short time before in Los Angeles. In the first two rounds, Miler knocked Joe down seven times. Joe got up seven times, but he was a badly beaten boy at the end of the bout.

The Miler fight was important in Louis' life in several ways. For one thing, when the ring announcer asked whether he wanted to be introduced as "Joe Louis Barrow," Joe was struck by the fact that the name was long for a boxer, and told him to

omit "Barrow." But the encounter did more for Louis than give him a ring name. It taught him that he had a tremendous amount to learn about the art of boxing. And it doubled his determination to become successful as a pugilist. When Joe returned home, and his mother saw his battered face, she was flabbergasted. But she didn't point out the moral, for she thought it sufficiently obvious. The next week Joe, his pride hurt more than his body had been, returned to the gymnasium to train harder than ever. Lillie, although she had not expected such a reaction, understood it when it came. She continued to keep quiet and to pray nightly that everything would work out all right.

Everything did. Joe returned to the amateur ring and won an impressive string of victories. All of this was extra-curricular activity for him, though, because he still worked in the Briggs factory every day where he earned little money for his labors. Jobs were hard to find in 1933. Those with decent salaries were particularly hard for Negroes with little education to get, and the Barrow income was evidence of this. One summer morning Lillie, down to her last dollar, felt desperate enough to gamble it. She gave the dollar to Joe, in the hope he could discover something better, and to his older brother Alonzo, to carry them through a day of job hunting.

Joe recalls the day well. "Alonzo and I headed for the Ford plant. It was early, but the line of guys who wanted jobs stretched for blocks. I remember how

hot the sun was—seemed like it would bake all the juice out of us. Never saw a line move so slow. We stood and stood and stood before we got a chance to move a little. When it came noontime we were like to dead. Alonzo took the dollar and went out to buy some hot dogs while I held his place in line. We didn't know any other kind of meat but hot dogs in those days. Finally, late in the afternoon, we got to the employment window. Alonzo didn't get a job, but I was lucky. They hired me for twenty-five dollars a week. Our feet were aching so we thought they'd fall off by the time we got home. But it was worth it, and I sure was glad to tell Ma about that twenty-five."

Besides the money he received from the Ford company, Joe began to bring home merchandise checks as rewards for his boxing efforts. He compiled a sparkling record as an amateur, but was keenly disappointed when, in 1933, he was nosed out in the finals of the National Amateur Light Heavyweight Championships, held that year in Boston. On top of this defeat came another at the hands of one Clinton Bridges, and a third by one Stanley Evans, early in 1934. Then, once again, Joe hit his winning stride, and in April, 1934, he won the national title he had so narrowly missed the year before. In the meanwhile, his talented fists and modest manners had attracted the attention of three men who were to play an important part in making Joe Louis what he is today.

## 4. The Men Behind the Scenes

JOHN ROXBOROUGH, A HIGHLY INTELLIGENT, QUIET Negro, first met Joe Louis in 1934, just after his defeat by Stanley Evans. Roxborough at the time was looking for the fulfillment of his favorite dream, as, indeed, he had been doing for several years.

A graduate of the University of Detroit and the Detroit College of Law, Roxborough was a leader of his people in Detroit. At the University he had been a star basketball player, and his interest in sports lasted long after his college days were over. He helped to organize the Young Negroes' Progressive Association, and assisted the Urban League in stimulating wholesome recreation among the Negroes on Detroit's East Side. He made a success of his law practice, and later went into the real-estate business, where he was also successful.

Roxborough's background was very different from that of Joe Louis. His father was a lawyer before him. When John was seven years old, his family moved from New Orleans to Detroit, where the young man's brains made him such an outstanding pupil that he proved himself college material. After he had become a success in the business world, John

was able to extend his philanthropy. Young Detroit Negroes began to regard him as a sort of second father, a man who could not do enough to help his people. John sent a number of them to college. He generously donated funds to various athletic associations to which Negroes belonged—in fact, he helped the Brewster Center boxing team of which Joe Louis was a member by buying equipment for them and financing the construction of a new gymnasium. For every boy helped by Roxborough who learned the name of his benefactor, a dozen did not. John always shunned the spotlight.

An idea had been growing in Roxborough's mind ever since his graduation from college. It was the idea of one day finding a Negro boy with a particular gift—preferably an athletic gift—that would make him outstanding, and of molding this boy into a veritable ambassador of good will from the Negro race to the white race. To many, the idea might have sounded fantastic. Some of his friends advised John to forget it, and to continue to help his people in a more conventional manner. They pointed out that as Vice President of the Great Lakes Mutual Life Insurance Company he had gained a good deal of respect for himself and his cause. His activities as Chairman of the Board of the Superior Life Insurance Society for obtaining employment for the Negro race had performed a similar function. Why not forget his dream and concentrate on the type of thing that had gained results? But John, in his quiet way, was obdurate.

As Roxborough was a mystery to many of his friends then, so he has been a mystery to most of the sports writers who since have become intimate with Joe Louis and Joe's other advisers and pals. Roxborough never talked much. He has always tried to be seen as little as possible, and even after he became manager of the heavyweight champion, refused to climb into the brightly lighted ring with Louis and work for him in his corner. The facts reporters have been able to learn about John, especially where they concern his philanthropy, were not easily brought to light. If there is a mystery, an unanswered question connected with the rise of Louis, it is Roxborough, for existing with the man's virtues from the beginning was a fault apparently inconsistent with the rest of his character. This fault was to cause John humiliation in years to come, and to provide one of the greatest ironies of modern sports history.

The night that Roxborough met Joe Louis he was convinced he had made the acquaintance not only of a promising amateur but also of an exceptional young man. Joe did not offer an alibi after Evans had defeated him. This in itself was unusual. But when Roxborough learned from the trainer of Joe's boxing team that the modest loser had taken the bout with Evans on short notice and had virtually no time in which to train for it, he was doubly impressed. He began following Joe around to his fights and watching his boxing in the ring and his deportment outside of it.

Meanwhile a Chicago Negro, Julian Black, also

had been attracted by the competent fists of the young Louis. Black, who was in the real-estate business and had coöperated with Roxborough in several business enterprises, saw Joe lose to Clinton Bridges just before his loss to Evans. The story of how and why Julian became interested in Joe is not without humor.

Black had, from time to time, managed boxers, and he fancied himself a competent judge of rising pugilists. His eye was taken with Clinton Bridges as it had been with few boxers. He began following Bridges around to his fights as Roxborough later was to follow Louis. Since a good left jab is the most valuable punch an amateur can possess, and since Bridges flashed an exceptionally fine jab, Julian was beginning to believe he would be a dunce not to buy the boy's contract and encourage him to turn professional. Just to make sure, however, he decided to take an expert with him to Detroit to watch Bridges compete—as it happened, against Joe Louis. The expert Julian invited to make the trip was the famous Jack Blackburn, one of the greatest welterweights of all time, whose uncanny ring skill dazzled his opponents of the early 1900's. Jack, since his boxing days, had developed into one of the top trainers of the country. Although a Negro himself, he objected to training Negro boxers, because, "You can't get them any place. White folks don't like to see colored men at the top. Ain't nothing but misery waiting for you if you buy the contract of a colored fighter."



Nonetheless, Blackburn accompanied Black to Detroit and watched attentively as Bridges eked out a decision over Louis. After the bout was over, Black, very jubilant, asked what Jack thought about Bridges now. Blackburn answered without hesitation. "If you really want to manage a colored boxer, I say go after the boy that lost—that Joe Louis. He's the one that's got the rhythm shows he's just naturally a fighter."

"You don't say?" Black raised his eyebrows.

"Yeah, that's what I say. And I also say anybody that thinks they can get a colored boxer up to the top—especially a heavyweight—after all the fuss white folks made about Jack Johnson ought to have their head examined."

Black, however, was not convinced that the old trainer had been right in his estimate of Joe Louis. In fact, he probably would have forgotten all about Louis had not his friend Roxborough brought up the subject every time the two men met. "You really ought to see him fight some more, Julian," John would say. "He's an unusual boxer—has a hard punch and some feeling for the fine points of the game, too. Besides," Roxborough always added, "he's a good boy. Everybody says so."

Black's interest in Louis grew. He began to feel, as did Roxborough, that Joe's abilities should be developed to the fullest, and he had Jack Blackburn in mind as the developer. Neither Roxborough nor Black entertained any serious idea of Joe Louis'

turning professional at this time. But Joe did.

One spring day in 1934, not long after Louis had won the amateur light heavyweight title, Lillie sent for Roxborough, and, when John arrived at the Brooks home, told him, "Joe's fixing to give up his job at the Ford plant. He says he's going to turn professional and make a living fighting. I've talked to him, but it ain't done no good. He says he can make twenty-five dollars a fight or more." Roxborough was surprised that Joe had made any such decision. Lillie went on, "He's a good boy, Mr. Roxborough, and he's 'most always done what I asked until he got this crazy boxing business in his head. Can't you do something to convince him there ain't nothing in it and he'll only get hurt?" Roxborough said he'd do what he could.

But as soon as he mentioned the subject to Joe, he met a stubbornness that he had thought quite foreign to Louis' nature. "I'm going to fight amateur once more, 'cause I've promised to," Joe said. "But that's all. I think I'm ready to fight for money, and my folks need money." Roxborough tried to talk Joe into waiting at least another year, until he was twenty-one. But Louis refused. Roxborough knew when he was beaten. "All right," he said. "If you turn professional, I'll do the best I can to help you."

John Roxborough has never said whether, upon leaving Louis after that interview, he dared let himself believe that here, at last, might be his good-will ambassador in the making.

## 5. Ambassador Louis

ONCE, MANY YEARS BEFORE JOE LOUIS MADE HIS decision to become a professional fighter, another Negro, Jack Johnson, had won the world's heavy-weight boxing championship. Johnson, known as Li'l Artha, had a skin of ebony, a smile of gold, and an unwillingness to admit himself inferior to anyone in any way.

When Li'l Artha pounded the champion, Tommy Burns, into a repulsive hulk and won the title in December, 1908, at Sydney, Australia, his apparent conceit, his maddening impudence antagonized white spectators. Jack London wrote perhaps the most famous account of a boxing bout in existence, describing Johnson's win. "The fight! There was no fight!" wrote London. He described the battle as a massacre in which Johnson, flashing his amazing ring science and smiling a golden smile, toyed with his white opponent, laughed at him, made a fool of him. At the end of his story of the bout, London expressed the hope that somewhere in America might be found a man to crush this impudent black. He called upon Jim Jeffries, the retired champion, to uphold the honor of the white race. "Jeff, it's up to you!"

Indignation was aroused throughout the country, and Jeffries was virtually forced to enter the ring again. When he did so he had passed his peak and was easy prey for laughing, wisecracking Jack Johnson, who directed a stream of witty insults at Jeffries and his white seconds while making the former champion look almost as absurd as Tommy Burns had. The day after the bout there were race riots throughout the country. The New York *Herald* carried the headline, HALF-DOZEN DEAD AS CROWDS ATTACK NEGROES; REIGN OF TERROR HERE. Moving pictures of the fight brought more trouble wherever they were shown, and interstate transportation of fight films was banned by Congress.

Johnson did little to assuage the hate of his white countrymen. He continued to gloat over his fallen white opponents, a broad smile on his face. He married several times, and the majority of his wives were white. He talked loudly, dressed flashily, and let the world know that he was the greatest boxer who had ever put on a glove. Soon all sportsdom was engaged in searching for "white hopes," men who might be induced to enter the ring and train with one purpose in mind: returning the title to the white race.

Boxing never has forgotten Jack Johnson. Tex Rickard, the most famous promoter the sport ever knew, swore that he would never, under any circumstances, promote a championship bout in which a Negro was involved. From the time of Johnson to the time of Louis, no Negro ever fought for the

heavyweight title. Harry Wills, a black man, was the leading contender for Dempsey's title at one time, but Dempsey drew the color line, refusing to meet him. It was tacitly admitted that America would not accept a Negro in the role of world's champion.

No men could have been more acutely conscious of the barriers that would be raised against any Negro aspiring to the title than were John Roxborough and Julian Black. Roxborough went to Black shortly after his talk with Louis, and reported that young Joe had set his heart on boxing as a profession. Black, as surprised as Roxborough had been, at once saw the complications involved. "This," he said, "will take some doing."

Roxborough agreed. "But he is a good boy. He was born that way. If we can only make white people believe it—if we can only make them *want* him to fight for the title—provided, of course, he gets good enough to."

It was then that Roxborough and Black began to map Joe Louis' campaign for the respect of his countrymen. "First of all," said Roxborough, "he musn't engage in bouts that are not contested strictly on their merits."

"I don't think he would anyway," said Black, smiling. "That would be dishonest, and Joe 'ain't going to have anything to do with what ain't right.'"

"Remember that Jack Johnson smile?" demanded Roxborough. Black shuddered. "No smiling for Joe when he wins over a white opponent," John said.

"No talking, either. In fact, nothing in the ring but fighting."

"Fair fighting," Black amended. "Nothing but fair fighting. If he isn't good enough to win according to the rules, he isn't good enough to win."

And so the Louis "dead pan" was born, and Joe was committed, quite willingly, to a policy of never doing what every other champion whom history records did—taking advantage of the referee's incompetence or lack of attention by getting in low blows; heeling, or rubbing his glove laces over his opponent's face in an effort to cut it; landing the vicious rabbit punch; roughing it up in clinches; hitting while breaking out of clinches; and using all the other illegal tricks that are known to experienced boxers.

How well Louis has not only adhered to the letter of the rules but also the spirit of them is perhaps best illustrated by his fight with Billy Conn, held June 18, 1941, in New York's Polo Grounds. The bout constituted Joe's eighteenth defense of his heavyweight title, won four years previously. In it Louis came very close indeed to losing his championship. For Conn, a colorful, swaggering Irishman from Pittsburgh, was at his best, while Joe, in the opinion of many, had overtrained.

Louis won the earlier rounds of the contest, but as round after round was reeled off and Conn continued to dance about the ring, darting out a quick, accurate left, the Pittsburgher piled up points.

Throughout the bout Conn directed a stream of invective at Louis, hoping to rattle the champion. Louis made no response. Nor did he, when Conn heeled repeatedly, reply in kind. Reporters at the ringside became excited as the eighth round slipped into the ninth, and the ninth into the tenth, while the young Irishman continued his barrage of words and blows. They knew that if he continued to box as he was boxing then, he would win the fight. Louis knew it too. Old Jack Blackburn was telling him between rounds not to let that Conn man take the play away so much. In the tenth round, Joe later admitted, he felt his title slipping away from him. "I knew I had to do something fast." Then, for an electric moment midway through the tenth, Conn slipped in his corner, lost his balance, and left himself wide open. According to the rules, Joe could have gone in then and knocked Billy cold. But Louis, without hesitation, stepped back and permitted the challenger to regain his balance.

Conn went to his corner at the end of the round with a strange half-smile on his face. His seconds told him, "Keep it up." Conn, breathing heavily, replied, "The punches, all right, but the words, no. How are you going to insult a guy like that?"

In every way possible Louis has tried to keep his deportment above censure. He never drinks or smokes, even when out of training, for he says he has not felt the need of liquor or tobacco. The President of the Women's Christian Temperance Union

once officially recognized this fact by sending him a telegram before one of his fights to the effect that the Union was in his corner. Joe's comments about his own boxing ability and the achievements of other boxers show him to be one of the most modest celebrities America has ever had. The late Heywood Broun put himself on record as a devout admirer of Joe's post-battle remarks, which, he said, invariably have revealed both modesty and a talent for epigrams. After Louis knocked out Bob Pastor in the eleventh round at Detroit in 1939, he was confronted by a radio announcer who pushed a microphone in his face and asked, "Did Pastor hurt you, Joe?"

"Well," said Louis, "I knew he'd been hitting me," which was a smart reply, since Pastor is noted as a light puncher.

Next the announcer asked, "Were you worried at any time?"

Joe thought a second, then said, "It's nice to be champion, and so you're always worried."

This is the sort of remark which gradually has won over to Joe's cause people from all walks of life—some of whom hitherto considered that all boxers must be brutes. Never has Joe permitted himself to utter a scornful word about an opponent, no matter how pitiful his exhibition or how dirty his fighting. The Louis sense of humor, however, occasionally causes Joe to take a playful verbal poke at an adversary. For example, previous to his bout with Billy Conn, Joe noticed that the sports pages were



filled daily with Conn's declarations that Louis, as a fighter, was a false alarm, and that he, Conn, would make a fool of Joe in the ring. One day a reporter asked Joe what punch he counted on to beat Billy with. Louis replied, with a twinkle in his eye, "I don't know, but when I hit him, I hope his mouth is open. It most usually is."

Shortly after Louis turned professional, his deportment in the ring and outside of it gained the attention of leaders of his race. These men realized that an outstanding colored athlete, whose conduct was irreproachable, might do a tremendous amount of good for Negroes throughout the world. Many of them wrote to Joe expressing the hope that he would never do anything to hurt the cause of his people, should he become champion. Representative of this type of letter—a type Louis still receives—is a message written to him in 1935 by the pastor of a little Southern church. It reads, in part:

Some day I feel you will be the champion, and should this come to pass, try always to be the champion of your people, so that when you are no longer the champion, the world will say of you—he was a black man outside, but a white man inside, most of all in his heart.

More than any other boxer who held the heavy-weight title, Joe Louis has had a reason to box, to excel, to gain the respect of his countrymen. He has never let himself forget this. He once told a reporter, "If I ever let my people down, I hope I die."

## 6. A Famous Native Son

ONE OF THE REASONS JOE LOUIS DECIDED TO BECOME a professional pugilist when he did was a colored girl named Marva Trotter, whom he had met in Chicago.

While training for one of his amateur bouts at Grafton's Gymnasium on Randolph Street in 1933, Joe was approached by a friend, Gerard Hughes, a rabid sports fan. Accompanying Gerry was a young golden-colored lady. "Joe," Gerry said, "I finally persuaded this girl to come in here and meet you. Her name is Marva Trotter. Marva, meet Joe Louis, the next world's heavyweight boxing champion."

Marva was a beautiful girl, and Joe didn't easily forget her. He took her to the movies fairly often. But one thing about their relationship bothered him—Marva seemed far above him in many ways. The Trotters were high up in Chicago Negro society. Marva had graduated from Inglewood High School and then from the Gregg Business School. Her grammar was perfect, her manners above criticism. She even had a brother who was a minister. She had known advantages which were denied to Joe, and her every word and action showed it. Certainly she was not the type of girl to be won by a

laborer in the Ford plant who made only five dollars a day, could not express himself well, and saw little hope for a bright future, unless. . . Suppose Gerry Hughes had been right, and Joe could become world's champion? That vision caused Louis to do a good deal of thinking. Coupled with his family's need for more money, it determined him to resign his job at the Ford plant and become a professional boxer.

Officials at Ford had become very interested in Joe, partly because of his boxing ability, and they were sorry to see him leave. Don Marshall, who had hired Louis a year before, was particularly concerned. He felt Joe was making a mistake in giving up a steady income on the long chance that he might make more in the ring. "I tell you what, Joe," he said, "I'll give you a leave of absence, so you can come back and have your old job if things don't go so well as you think they will." Louis was very grateful. Mr. Marshall, who has since become one of his most avid fans, told Joe after he had won the title that the offer still held good, and that it always would. "You're always welcome at Ford, Joe."

When Roxborough and Black were making plans for Louis' professional career, they decided, among other things, that leather-colored Jack Blackburn should train their charge. Blackburn, upon hearing the news, said, "O.K. That is, if you pay me a regular salary every week. None of this percentage of the gate stuff for me. He ain't going to make no

money worth shaking your finger at. Remember, he's a colored boy." And so it was settled. After Joe Louis drew his first million-dollar gate, Blackburn got a ribbing from his young charge about that "regular salary." Joe had seen that the salary was substantially increased, but he couldn't resist asking old Jack now and then if he wasn't a wee bit sorry to lose a slice of the million-dollar gate.

Blackburn worked in the gymnasium with Louis only two weeks before he pronounced him ready for the professional ring. "I don't mean he's perfect," canny Jack would say. "I just mean he's amazing good for a young kid that ain't had no more experience than he's had. He had fifty-four fights as an amateur and won fifty of them. That's part of the story. But it ain't all. It don't tell you what a quick Chappie he is to learn. I tried to teach him in those two weeks about how to stand so you stay on balance, and how to hold your hands, and how not to waste your strength. Chappie, he don't have to hear what I say more than once before he's doing it. He's made right for a fighter somehow. Sure is a joy to work with."

Joe fought his first professional bout July 4, 1934, at the Bacon Casino in Chicago. Blackburn gave Louis instructions just before the bell rang—"and when he drops his guard, whip over the right." Joe followed Jack's suggestions to the letter. His opponent, Jack Kracken, went out in the first round.

The Kracken bout launched a series of twelve

fight fought by Louis in Detroit and Chicago during 1934. Ten of these matches Louis won by knock-outs. The others he took on decisions. Always Blackburn was in his corner, saying, "Listen now what I say, Chappie. . . ." Always when Louis came back to his corner after a hard round, Blackburn had already climbed into the ring and placed the stool in Joe's corner, ready to give his Chappie whatever help he might need. The old trainer's fingers moved with rare skill when he massaged Joe's muscles, and his crooning voice gave Louis a kind of confidence that nothing else could.

Joe waged his last fight of the year against Lee Ramage in Chicago. The Louis management was criticized by a number of fistic sages for pitting their young charge against a fighter of the reputation which Ramage boasted. Lee had recently held Maxie Rosenbloom, then the light heavyweight champion, to a draw. Anyone who could do that was good. And a fighter of Lee's undoubted experience and skill was judged by most people to be far removed from Joe Louis' league. For the first three rounds, Joe took a beating from the fast, dancing boy in front of him, and it looked as though he had been over-matched. Then, just before the fourth round began, Blackburn told Joe to gun for Ramage's body in an attempt to slow him down. This change of tactics won Joe an eight-round knockout and nation-wide fame. But Joe wasn't so much concerned with that fact as he was with the knowledge that Marva Trot-

ter had been at the fight, and with his plans for giving his family a merry Christmas. Right after the fight he went home to spend the Christmas holidays with his mother, stepfather, and his brothers and sisters.

Such a Christmas Lillie and her children had never known. On Christmas eve Joe told his mother he had bought a new house for her—a roomy comfortable home. "It's yours, Ma," he said. "All yours." While Lillie tried to catch her breath and make herself believe what she heard, Joe's brothers and sisters were squealing in delight, for Joe had arranged for each of them to be dressed in a brand new outfit in celebration of the holiday season. It was a grand homecoming.

But Joe couldn't afford to take a long vacation—not now, when sports fans were becoming increasingly conscious of his name. In January he was back in the ring at Detroit, where he took a ten-round decision from wily, tough Patsy Perroni. The next week he knocked out Hans Birkie in Pittsburgh. About this time Joe came to the attention of a man who was to play a significant role in his future career. Mike Jacobs, formerly associated with the master promoter Tex Rickard, was getting ready to compete with Madison Square Garden in the promotion of boxing. He was looking around for a boxer who would prove a good drawing card and so give his venture a rousing send-off. Before long, he got in touch with Roxborough and Black. He felt

them out on the subject of Primo Carnera, who recently had lost his title to Max Baer. Would Louis fight Carnera? After some consideration, Roxborough and Black accepted the match. Jack Blackburn assured them they were making no mistake.

Jacobs, who has an uncanny judgment of what the public will like and what it won't, and is usually willing to gamble on the correctness of that judgment, got busy. He knew that few sports writers outside of Chicago and Detroit had seen Louis. He was especially anxious to acquaint the New York press with Joe's ring style, since he had visions of promoting a Louis-Carnera bout in Manhattan. For these reasons he decided to gamble several thousand dollars by inviting the boxing writers from all of New York's dailies and from the news services to travel to Detroit at his expense and see Louis meet Natie Brown there March 28. Mike Jacobs gained priceless publicity for Joe Louis in return for his modest investment.

Natie Brown was noted as a "spoiler." He was a clever boxer who knew all the tricks of the ring and, upon occasion, invented some new ones. He was very hard to hit and even harder to hurt. In the first round of his bout with Louis, however, it looked as though his ring wisdom might avail him little, for he was floored for a count of nine. But Brown got up with a determination not to be hit squarely again. Joe didn't get another clean shot at him. To avoid punishment Natie ducked and stalled. When cor-

nered, he draped himself over the ropes and turned his back to the ring. Louis would have been well within the rules had he hit Brown when the latter leaned on the ropes. But he refused to. Each time Natie found the going too rough, he turned his back to Joe. And Joe stepped away, to wait patiently until Natie was disposed to resume a fighting stance.

When the battle was over and Louis declared the winner, New York sports writers went into a huddle and compared notes. As Mike Jacobs heard some of their comments, he grinned broadly.

"What a punch—and with both hands!" one of the top columnists exclaimed.

"He can box, too. That's the amazing part of it. You might almost say he was a big Joe Gans," said another.

"He hits as hard as Dempsey—maybe harder."

"Dempsey would have gone after Brown when Natie was hanging on the ropes. Maybe this Louis doesn't have the fighting instinct."

"Don't worry. He just wants to make sure we don't put him down as another Jack Johnson. I never saw such a clean fighter."

Mike Jacobs felt very happy that night. He felt even happier the next morning when he read New York's leading newspapers. The best-known sports writers of the country were unanimous in proclaiming the advent of a truly great heavyweight—the first to arrive since Gene Tunney won the title in 1926. Some said Joe was a chocolate Dempsey. All agreed



he was to write a long and glorious chapter in the history of boxing. A new and brilliant star had risen on boxing's horizon.

The date for the Louis-Carnera bout was set: June 25, 1935. As the time for the battle approached, a few people connected with it began to feel qualms. Among these was William Randolph Hearst, whose New York *American* had played up the bout because Mrs. Hearst's Milk Fund stood to receive a percentage of the gate receipts. Mr. Hearst finally decided he wanted the fight called off. He pointed out that trouble was brewing between Italy and Ethiopia, and was receiving a good deal of space in the press. To match a Negro with a white man in an important bout would have been daring enough at any time. But to pair one with an Italian when the world was super-conscious of the Italian-Ethiopian crisis struck him as foolhardy. He was overruled.

Sixty-two thousand men and women sat on the edges of their seats in Yankee Stadium as they waited for the bout between Louis and Primo Carnera to begin. It was a soft June night. But the crowd didn't seem to know it. A restless shuffling of feet, a rustling of programs—they were impatient.

Louis and Carnera sat in their corners, facing each other across the ring. Just before the gong was to sound beginning the bout, Harry Balogh, the announcer, stepped to the center of the ring. He raised his hand for attention. "Ladies and gentlemen, tonight we have gathered here to watch a contest of

athletic skill. We are Americans. That means that we have come from homes of many different faiths, and that we represent a lot of different nationalities. In America, we admire the athlete who can win by virtue of his skill. Let me then ask you to join me in the sincere wish that regardless of race, color, or creed, the better man may emerge victorious. Thank you!"

When the incredibly quick and accurate fists of Joe Louis thudded home to Carnera's body and jaw so often that they made the Italian giant appear a ridiculous, pitiful, figure; when Louis knocked Carnera out in the sixth round, there were no disagreeable repercussions. The crowd that streamed out of the Stadium did not talk of "white hopes," nor of making any kind of trouble for the coffee-colored victor. They appeared content that the better man had emerged victorious.

## 7. September 24, 1935

**T**WELVE DAYS BEFORE JOE LOUIS' VICTORY OVER Primo Carnera, the heavyweight title changed hands. Erratic Max Baer, one of the most colorful fighters the ring has ever known, dropped his title to James J. Braddock, a family man, in a tragi-comedy staged at Long Island City Bowl.

While half of the nation's sports followers cheered Braddock the other half crept into solitude and wept for Baer. It was all very well to say that Braddock's story was one of the most heart-warming in all ring history—the story of a broken, down-and-out boxer who fought his way off relief and into the proudest title in sports. It was very well to say that he received his due—that he had trained harder than his adversary, been in better condition as a result, and won beyond a shadow of a doubt. But Baer, even in miserable defeat, kept his following. Sports fans, justly accused of being sentimental, admired and liked Jim Braddock. But they loved Baer.

Max never should have been a boxer. By the time he was famous he had come to recognize this fact, and the public began to suspect it. For Baer was revolted at the idea of really hurting anybody. There

were those who said he was even more appalled at the prospect of being hurt himself. When all was said and done, Max couldn't see much justification for the boxing business. Yet his beautiful build and tremendous right hand punch had turned him toward boxing when he was of high-school age. He boxed for some years before his opinion of boxing was clear even to himself. And when it became clear, Max lacked the will to leave the world of glamor and color that surrounds sports celebrities. Sports writers found the handsome, witty Baer, who laughed loudly at all the world, but loudest of all at himself, magnificent copy. Many of them remonstrated with him for not seeing the good points of boxing, which, they pointed out, is a far less dangerous sport than football, and teaches many who practice it the important lessons of alertness, courage, and self-reliance. But no one could be angry with Baer very long. He winked at his critics, and most of them smiled back at him.

When Baer lost to Braddock he was sadly out of condition. His hands were sore, which meant he had to ration his punches. He had not done enough road work to put the added strength in his legs which the fifteen-round bout was to demand. In his heart of hearts he could see little sense in training for the plodding family man, anyway.

As the rounds went by Max found himself playing a supporting role for the first time in his career. Braddock jabbed and circled, jabbed and circled,

and Max could not hit him. Soggy, smelly leather thudded home to Baer's face monotonously, painfully. The crowd hooted at Max's wild efforts to retaliate. At the end of the bout, stripped of the glamor of champions, Baer smiled through the sweat and blood at Jim Braddock, congratulated him, and left the ring looking like the loneliest man in the world in spite of his attempt at a convincing grin.

Then the reaction set in. Boxing fans and sports writers alike refused to believe that Baer was through. They pointed to his sparkling record of knockouts, to the speed he had shown in other bouts, to the undeniable potency of his big right hand. He had been out of condition for Braddock and had lost, but surely he had learned his lesson. He could come back. What a magnificent thing it would be, thought the Baer fans, if Max were to regain his reputation as a ring "killer" at the expense of young Joe Louis, boxing's newest sensation.

Mike Jacobs, envisioning the first million-dollar gate since the golden reign of Dempsey, approached Max about the proposed fight. Baer, because of his own nature, had a hard time deciding whether to accept the match or not. His back-slapping friends, he knew, had forgiven him for losing to old Jim Braddock only because they counted on his returning to the ring to vindicate himself. For them and for the sake of regaining his self-respect, he wanted to fight again. Yet all his instincts were against meeting this young Louis.

Several things about Joe bothered Max. In the first place, Joe struck Max as a dubious foil for a comeback. Baer had the tendency, which often proved unfortunate, of reading a great deal and thinking about what he read. The story of Louis' reaction to the Braddock fight had not escaped him. Joe, sitting at ringside, had turned to Roxborough and asked very seriously, "You mean those are the two best fighters in the world?" John had said they were so advertised, at any rate. And Joe, forgetting his dead pan, had laughed so heartily that his whole frame rocked.

In the second place, Max had an uncomfortable suspicion that, unlike himself, Joe had found something worth fighting for. Max had blundered through his fights, winning by virtue of the strength and ability with which he was born, because the world put a premium on good fighters. He could take no fight seriously. While inside the ropes he would laugh at the crowd, his opponent, himself—at the whole big crazy world that raised boxers to a pedestal of glory. Joe, on the other hand, boxed shrewdly, methodically, concentrating on his work as if it were of the utmost importance and interest to him. The sense of purpose behind Joe's gloves awed and mystified Baer.

Yet, when his friends brought pressure upon him; when Jack Dempsey, apparently somewhat disturbed by the prominence the colored Louis was gaining, offered to train him; and when sports writers began

to wonder publicly whether the vaunted Baer ability could not have been a myth of their own concoction, Max agreed to sign for the fight.

Meanwhile, Baer's opponent in the coming "battle of the century" was enjoying some of the happiest days he had known. Still the same Joe Louis in spite of the praise heaped upon him for his performance against Carnera and the adulation of Negroes throughout the nation, he found great pleasure in going of an afternoon to Navin Field in Detroit and watching his beloved Tigers play baseball. A seat behind home plate, a vanilla ice cream cone when the sun became too hot, and a friend with whom to discuss the game—these completely delighted him.

Between ball games Joe stayed at home for the most part and ate his ma's good cooking. Shortly after the Carnera fight an incident occurred which convinced him of the advisability of such a course. Lillie had cooked a steak as Joe liked it for dinner. But just before the meal was to go on the table, Joe came downstairs dressed in a new suit and said he was going downtown "to see the gang." He smiled at her and started striding briskly toward the door. Lillie put her hands on her hips. "Joe Louis!" she said. Joe stopped and turned around. "My son ain't never going to be too busy to eat a meal his ma cooks for him. It's good food. You need it. Where'd you get such high-faluting ideas, anyhow?" Joe considered for a second. He went into the dining room and ate the steak. "That," he told his mother when not

a scrap of the meal remained, "was the best steak I ever had." And he meant it.

Joe wanted to show his family in every way he could how much he appreciated them all. He didn't stop at giving them presents. He did a lot of little things every day to convince them he was as proud of them as a family as they were of him as a son and brother. Recently he had taken his kid sister Vunies to California on a pleasure trip as a reward for having graduated from high school *cum laude*. Now he was helping her plan the courses she would take in Howard University, where he had promised to send her in the fall.

When news reached Joe that Baer had signed and that he was expected to report to his Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, training camp, he was rested and ready to go. Moreover, the event which he had longed for during the past two years was about to take place. Marva Trotter had recently consented to become his wife. Marriage now, when Joe had four weeks of training ahead of him, was out of the question. So Joe proposed, and Marva agreed, that they be married a few hours before the Baer bout. Their honeymoon was to begin right after it.

By the time Louis was established in his training camp, newspapers were filled with speculations about the coming battle. Baer talked a great fight. There could be no doubt that Max was impressed by the responsibility his friends and followers were placing



on his shoulders—the responsibility of proving that the Braddock fight was just a bad dream, that he, Baer, was all that his most complimentary admirers had ever proclaimed. While Louis went silently through his daily paces, Max chattered continually about the advantages of experience. He had never appeared so determined to win a bout. Odds-makers hesitated, listening to Baer, but finally established Louis as a two-to-one favorite.

On the day of the battle, Mike Jacobs confidently predicted that ninety thousand people would pay a million dollars to watch the handsome Baer and the chocolate-colored Louis meet in Yankee Stadium. But Joe listened with only half an ear. After all, this was his wedding day. Marva had made most of the arrangements while he was in training, and Joe was more interested in thinking about them than in talking fights. Veteran boxing men were unanimous in saying they had never seen a boxer so unconcerned on the day of an important fight as was Joe Louis on September 24, 1935, while he thought about his approaching wedding. Baer was late for the weighing-in ceremony at noon. Louis nonchalantly read a newspaper while he waited for him. Baer, once arrived, tried with notable lack of success to ruffle Joe's calm by quips. After the boxers' weights had been registered, boxing writers sought their typewriters and wrote that the only person at the weighing-in who was not nervous about the fight was Joe Louis. Max Baer went to his hotel and spent

the time before the bout wondering whether Louis could be human.

At eight o'clock, just two hours before the fight, Joe arrived at the ground-floor apartment on Harlem's Sugar Hill that Marva had sublet for the wedding. He found his nineteen-year-old bride-to-be and her brother, Reverend Walter C. Trotter, waiting for him. There, before a few close friends, the Reverend Trotter married Joe and Marva. Joe slipped a four-carat diamond ring on his bride's fourth finger and told her he hoped she'd like his wedding presents—a new Lincoln automobile and a six-room apartment on Chicago's Michigan Avenue. Then Joe left for the fight. A police escort, with sirens screaming in the night air, conducted Joe to Yankee Stadium. Marva took her courage in both hands and quietly followed. The possibility of seeing Joe hurt frightened her and made her knees weak. But she was his wife now, and she felt she should be near him on this important occasion, to share in his joy if he won or to solace him if he lost. Upon reaching the stadium she took a seat in the fifteenth row, gritted her teeth, and waited.

The boxers were in their corners. Jack Blackburn was talking to Joe rapidly, smoothly. "Go out and box him, Chappie. He don't know how to box like you do. And when he starts to throw that long right hand, you beat him to the punch with your left jab.

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Right: Continuous action photos show Louis setting up Schmeling for kayo in first round of scheduled 15-round bout.

(International News)

That'll break up his rhythm, and before long he'll be ready for the knockout." Joe listened attentively. The bell sounded, and the Brown Bomber shuffled out to the center of the ring. It took only a minute for him to ascertain that Blackburn had been right—astonishingly right. The "battle of the century" which sports writers had expected turned into an exhibition by Louis of the greatest boxing art seen in years, and an exhibition by Baer of a tremendous ability to take it. In the fourth round Baer was knocked down and stayed there. He could have got up. But he could see no sense in it. He had tried every tactic he knew, and had failed to hit his antagonist squarely once. He was counted out on one knee, shaking his head from side to side, as if to say mere human strength and cunning could not be expected to prevail against the super-fighter who had beaten him.

The next day the sports writers of the nation proclaimed that if any human being could be invincible, Joe Louis was. Before Louis' greatness had been acknowledged. Now it was shouted from the roof tops. Men doubted that Sullivan, Jeffries, Johnson, or even the mighty Dempsey could have coped with the coffee-colored terror who made a ridiculous plaything of Max Baer. Baer doubted it, too. Said he, "Sure, I could have got up that last time. But I figured, 'Twenty dollars may entitle these people at ringside to see a fight. But it doesn't entitle them to see a murder.' "

Joe Louis pocketed the \$240,000 he received for his night's work, read his press notices, and reflected that it was indeed wonderful to be walking along boxing's glory road.

## 8. A German Sees Something

AS JOE'S REPUTATION AS A GREAT ATHLETE GREW, SO grew his reputation as an ambassador. News of some of the good deeds which he performed quietly began to leak through to the press from certain of Joe's friends, who felt the world should gain a better knowledge of what lay behind the Louis poker face. So people learned that when the Joe Louises were in Chicago or Detroit, funds mysteriously appeared which made possible church parties for poor children and aid for the needy colored families of the city. They learned, too, that Joe was never seen to take a drink, and that he and Marva made a policy of never throwing wild parties. Joe had been a respected citizen of Detroit. Now he and Marva became as much respected in Chicago.

Few articles appearing in America's newspapers and periodicals failed, if they mentioned Louis, to mention also the good will which he was building up for the Negro people. The most notable exception was a piece by Paul Gallico which appeared in the *Reader's Digest*. The article was entitled "Mean Man." Not only did Mr. Gallico express doubt about Joe's interest in helping his people, but he

painted Louis as a cold, cruel, brute of a man—an automaton who enjoyed hurting people and was incapable of doing anything constructive. "He's a mean, mean man," Mr. Gallico summed up in the concluding sentence of his article.

This piece hit Joe harder than any opponent ever had. It was quite true that the article was based on Gallico's observation of Louis in training, where Bomber Louis was on view but Louis, the man, accessible only to his close friends. It was also true that Gallico openly admitted it simply represented an impression he had received by watching Joe around the training camp over a short period of time. But how many readers would keep these facts in mind as they read the cleverly, forcefully expressed opinion of Gallico? A good many people had a faint suspicion that most fighters must be "mean" anyway. And a Negro fighter—well!

Joe talked over the matter with Roxborough and Black. "Roxy," he said, "what can I do?"

His managers were as much concerned as Joe was. Roxborough was particularly disturbed, because he felt Louis' growing reputation as a good-will ambassador might be impaired. "I guess," he said, "that since Mr. Gallico wrote that article only as an impression he had gathered and not as absolute fact, there's only one thing you can do. You can so conduct yourself that after a period of time he will form another impression." Julian Black agreed. "Gallico is a former sports writer and a fair shooter at heart,"

he said. "If we can show him he did you an injustice, he will more than make up for it." Joe nodded. He was willing to do almost anything to convince Gallico and the skeptics who agreed with him that they were much mistaken. "I got a lot of work to do," he told himself, "to help my people like I want."

Joe and Marva had two months together before the young athlete went into training for a bout with Paulino Uzcudun. In those two months they talked over Joe's career. Marva said she frankly would like to have him retire soon so that he wouldn't be away at training camps so much. It was hard being a boxer's wife and just seeing her husband for a few weeks or months at a time. But she was not going to dictate.

Joe understood Marva's attitude. The fact that a boxer's wife must be alone a good deal of the time and show a great deal of patience while her husband trains and makes public appearances of various kinds was well known. Joe did not maintain that his profession permitted him to be the most attentive of husbands. He only asked Marva to understand that very little of a famous boxer's time could be his own, and that he realized this fact made marriage difficult. But he believed they would be able to make it work out, nevertheless.

Marva, too, thought they could work it out. At the time it seemed possible that Joe might engage in only a few more bouts and then quit. He was taking

good care of his earnings, investing much of them in annuities. She had promised not to dictate when Joe should retire because she knew he felt he was aiding his people by remaining in the spotlight. When it was time to go into training for Uzcudun, Joe kissed Marva good-bye and returned to the wars.

No one greatly doubted who would win the Uzcudun battle. But the experts were interested in *how* Louis would win it. Uzcudun had an awkward, crouching, weaving style which the less experienced Louis might have trouble solving. Still more important, Paulino had fought the best men in his division and had never been knocked out. Some people said he was made of iron. Boxing fans wondered whether even Joe Louis could put the rugged Spaniard on the canvas. Mike Jacobs rubbed his hands in glee as ticket orders swamped the Madison Square Garden box office. "Sell-out," he told the sports writers.

The Uzcudun-Louis battle held more interest for a certain tall, broad-shouldered German than for any other of the twenty thousand people who crowded Madison Square Garden to watch it. The German's name was Max Schmeling. He had held the heavy-weight title a few years previously, and was making a comeback. Early in December he arrived in New York on the *Bremen*, and, shortly thereafter, challenged Jim Braddock. "Fight Louis first," was Braddock's answer. The shrewd German had come to the Garden to watch Louis and determine whether or not he wanted to meet him. He was accompanied by



Joe Jacobs, his diminutive, cigar-smoking American manager, whose salary Schmeling had cut to a fraction of what most boxing men thought he deserved because, Max said, "He is a Jew. Our Fuehrer does not like Jews."

The Louis-Uzcudun bout lasted four rounds. In the first three rounds Joe methodically and regularly jolted Paulino's head back with his left hand. In the fourth round Paulino dropped his guard for a split second, the Louis right flashed home, and Paulino was out. Through it all Schmeling leaned forward in his seat, his bushy black brows contracted, and analyzed the bout while it was in progress. His handsome face wore an excited, animated expression before the bout was two rounds old. "You know," he said to little Joe Jacobs, as he looked at him through rings of the latter's cigar smoke, "You know, I think I see something." The "something" which Max saw was a Louis mannerism that, as it chanced, no one else had noted. After delivering a left jab, Joe would drop his left hand for a fraction of a second.

While walking out of the Garden with his manager, Max whispered to "Yussel," "And my Sunday punch is a right cross. A right crossed over a lowered left hand," he mused.

"It ain't a bad idea," said Joe Jacobs, the idea growing on him. "He'll be overconfident. It'd get him by surprise. There's just one thing—that first right has to stun him so bad he don't know his own name or else knock him out. 'Cause if it don't, he'll

change his style, and our goose is cooked. It's a gamble—a long shot."

Max replied with his favorite epigram. "It is better to risk and lose," he said, "than never to risk at all."

By the time Max said good-bye to little Joe that night, he had determined to fight Louis. For he had a great deal to gain and nothing, or next to nothing, to lose. Max had been unpopular in Hitler Germany since, three years before, he was knocked out by Max Baer, a Jew. His unpopularity was increased by the fact that he maintained "Yussel" Jacobs as his manager in the face of official disapproval. The fact was that Schmeling did not dare to dismiss Jacobs, who was one of the greatest managers boxing ever knew. Jacobs steered Max into the title and, most boxing men thought, did more to win it for his fighter than Max did. To dismiss Jacobs would be to dismiss a major part of the Schmeling boxing ability, and Max knew it. But if he could beat Louis . . . then all might be forgotten and forgiven. If he could defeat this member of an "inferior" race, knock him out, he would become a German hero.

While Schmeling was concerned with thoughts of Louis, Joe was thinking of one Charlie Retzlaff, whom he was to face in mid-January of 1936. For this bout the Louis entourage moved to Chicago. Retzlaff, a native of North Dakota, possessed a tremendous amount of courage and a hard right hand. In the first round he utilized both for the purpose

of hitting Louis flush on the forehead. Louis retaliated with a barrage of blows which ended the fight within eighty-five seconds from going time. Louis' sensational knockouts were getting to be so much the expected thing that reporters felt the only news that could break in connection with a Louis fight would be a close bout or a losing one for Joe. They reported the Retzlaff fight much as they had other Louis knockouts. What else was there to say? Joe was just too good.

The New York *Times* was the only paper in the country that gave a novel twist to the Retzlaff bout. On the day of the battle most papers informed the public that the fight was to be broadcast from eleven p.m. to midnight over station WJZ. (The bout, if it had gone the scheduled fifteen rounds, would have taken just an hour.) The *Times*, however, had a different listing under the same station, as follows:

“11:00, WJZ. Boxing: Joe Louis-Charlie Retzlaff  
11:15, WJZ. Negro Male Quartet”

In a sense, the *Times* reported the event before it happened. And it did so with terseness, a considerable amount of accuracy, and a good deal of humor. A few have said it was one of the best sports reporting jobs of the year—as far as it went.

After the Retzlaff bout Joe decided to hang up his gloves for a while and return to his Chicago apartment and Marva. Schmeling had sailed for Germany after signing a contract to meet Joe the following June under the promotion of Mike Jacobs. When

news came back over the Atlantic that Max had revived the hated term of "white hope" which had been so popular during Jack Johnson's reign, Joe paid little attention. Max and his trainer, Max Machon, were proclaiming to the German press that Schmeling was to prove himself the "white hope" that would plunge the American Negro into hopeless defeat.

But Joe Louis was sure of his superiority to Schmeling both as a boxer and as a fighter—sure in a quiet sort of way. Self-confidence had overtaken him so gradually that he did not realize he then possessed a good deal more of it than when he fought Max Baer. He did not realize he possessed enough of it to dull his senses and help make a German's dream come true.

## 9. Defeat

**J**OE LOUIS CELEBRATED HIS TWENTY-SECOND BIRTHDAY at Lakewood, New Jersey, where he was in training for Max Schmeling. Joe's headquarters were in the Stanley Hotel, which offered marvelous entertainment facilities for visiting newspaper men. Louis had never before trained at a semi-resort, which Lakewood was. He expected to enjoy it.

Sports writers and celebrities from the sports world crowded Lakewood to attend Joe's birthday party. Mike Jacobs came bearing a giant cake for the young boxer. Jim Braddock arrived, shook Joe's hand, and wished him all the luck in the world. Nat Fleischer, editor of *Ring* magazine, contributed a bit of ceremony to the occasion by presenting Louis with a gold belt for having done the most for boxing during the preceding year. Joe, more at home with white people than he had been even a short time before, greeted all his guests with a smile. He was developing into a gracious host.

The birthday party set the key for Joe's activities at Lakewood. Joe took it easy. Not that he dissipated, or failed to train. He trained, but without enthusiasm. He did not think it necessary to be too

earnest about this fight. The sports writers had told him he couldn't lose, hadn't they? And Joe listened to them more than he had before—listened to their witty conversation, to their exaggerations. "Joe, I'd rather bet on my grandmother to lick you than Schmeling," one of them told him with a laugh. "She's only five feet tall, and you might have a little trouble adjusting the sights on those big guns of yours. Poor Schmeling! Over six feet of target!"

There was a golf course at Lakewood. Joe was grateful for it. Boxing now seemed so easy, he had lost some of his zest for sparring. But golf held forth a challenge. Joe, though a powerful driver on the links, lacked the finesse necessary to a really good player. He determined to acquire this finesse at Lakewood in the afternoons when he wasn't sparring. He confided this plan to Jack Blackburn. Canny Jack looked at him sharply. "Don't want to do too much of that, Chappie," he said.

"Why not?" asked Louis, surprised.

"'Cause that old sun liable to boil the juice right out of you if you don't watch out. You don't want to take off weight too fast. Remember that, Chappie."

Joe remembered, for a while, at least. But after a day of knocking his sparring partners about at will, of listening to the juke box the reporters were playing in the hotel, of being interviewed and photographed, he found the golf course something of a haven. It was especially fun when Joe Williams, of the *World-Telegram*, went along to play with Joe

and heckle him a bit. Louis liked to be kidded. He could relax with Williams and engage in a bit of verbal give and take, sure that his companion wouldn't misinterpret what he said. Williams, between warnings about sand traps and difficult holes, showed a willingness to talk with Louis about whatever came into Joe's head. The reporter was getting as much enjoyment out of the bright, hot afternoons as was his colored companion. He was privately surprised to discover how much personality lay behind Joe's expressionless face. Every now and then, when the big tan athlete would shade his eyes and look anxiously after a flying golf ball, Williams would study him and think that it was amazing any man could be as unconcerned about an approaching battle as Louis. Joe wouldn't boast or say much about how he thought he would win. But he was filled with confidence. His easy-going nature was getting the better of him.

The atmosphere at Napanoch, New York, where Max Schmeling was training, was very different from the one at Lakewood. Max, his mind set upon a goal, went about working his way toward that goal with a German efficiency that left no doubts in the minds of observers that Max was earnest. Six miles of roadwork in the morning. Sparring. Calisthenics. Everything done according to plan.

Reporters found Max peevish, easily offended. Most of them, however, pitied him because of the catastrophe they felt sure would overtake him when

he met Louis. If Schmeling was not gracious, they didn't think it necessary to play up the fact. After all, they thought, he was under a strain. Now and then Max would propound some Hitler philosophy which left a bad taste in the mouths of the press. But this did not receive a great deal of publicity, either. Racial questions, reporters felt, should not be debated in the boxing rings of the country. Joe Louis was succeeding in making boxing fans minimize the importance of race. What was the sense of printing Schmeling's remarks? They would only cause bad feeling. Besides, the German would, everyone thought, be knocked out early in the bout and, after grudgingly granting little Joe Jacobs his pittance, return to Germany.

Max, however, viewed the Louis bout as no one else did. He read that the odds on Louis were prohibitive, that bettors were demanding twenty dollars to be wagered on Louis for every one they were willing to risk on Schmeling. "That is good!" Max told himself. "Their Joe Louis will be so sure I am a poor boxer. That is good." And he applied himself to his training with increased vigor. His faithful German trainer, Max Machon, understood Max's plan of the right crossed over Louis' lowered left guard. Sometimes his eyes would meet Schmeling's, and the two men would feel that their hearts were in accord. "It would be a great victory for the fatherland," Machon would say. At these words Schmeling always nodded vigorously.



It rained on June 18th, causing Mike Jacobs to postpone the bout to the following day. The crowd which came to Yankee Stadium the evening of the bout was filled with excitement although few thought Schmeling had a chance to win. A large Negro delegation from Harlem arrived early to occupy the cheaper seats and await the appearance of their hero. They drank their pop and read their programs in high spirits. One of them, *their boy*, was going to fight and win before the forty-two thousand customers in the stadium. They identified themselves with him. Each success he had scored in the past had given them a new measure of self-respect. Most of them didn't mean to boast about Joe, any more than he himself would boast. But they could cheer for him, couldn't they? They could worship him as the living proof that a Negro could succeed against white opposition, if given half a chance.

When darkness had descended upon the stadium and the last preliminary bout had been decided, the German and the Negro climbed into the ring. Announcements and formalities out of the way, the gong rang. The fight was on. Louis, boxing easily, pressed forward, trying to make Max lead. Occasionally Schmeling did, but his movements were cautious. By the time the gong ended the round, Louis felt he had figured out Schmeling's style perfectly. "This'll be the easiest fight I ever had," he told Jack Blackburn in his corner.

"Foolish Chappie!" replied old Jack. "You're get-

ting too confident. Don't you know yet you can't count on nothing in the ring? You keep your eyes open. This old German didn't take the fight just for exercise. He ain't no fool."

And Jack Blackburn was right. Schmeling had been waiting patiently for an opening. In the fourth round it came. Joe jabbed and dropped his left hand. Schmeling hit him with a hard right hook. Louis felt a sharp pain in his head. Before he could recover, Schmeling landed another crunching right . . . and another. A shudder passed through Louis' big body. Max was set to hit him again, but Joe sank slowly to the canvas, trying vainly to support himself by the top strand of the ring ropes. He sprawled awkwardly in the resin. Referee Arthur Donovan began the count. He only reached three when Joe, weak and uncertain, arose. Above the wild shrieks of the mob, Jack Blackburn was shouting, "Stay down and take a nine-count, Chappie! Stay down!" But Joe did not hear him. He did not hear anything. He was out on his feet, boxing on instinct alone. He was incapable of thinking. He became an automaton.

At the end of the round, Blackburn and Julian Black worked furiously to bring Joe to his senses. As Louis boxed during the fifth round, he began once more to realize who and where he was, to use his brain as well as his brawn. The crowd, now almost hysterical, believed that he would yet fight through to victory. Just before the bell he ducked one of Schmeling's vicious right swings. Then came the

turning point of the fight. As the round ended, Joe dropped his hands and started to turn toward his corner. Schmeling hit him with the full force of his big right hand, flush upon the jaw. The referee ruled that this breach of the rules was not intentional upon Schmeling's part. But the damage was done.

That last right hand turned Joe Louis into a sleepwalker, groping his way through a nightmare. He felt detached from the fight, yet necessarily a part of it. He had the strange feeling that his body was being moved by a force outside of himself. He felt his fist strike out, but it seemed to him the movement was involuntary. He did not recognize his own corner of the ring. He did not know what was happening to him. His understanding had left him. Bright white lights and something moving in front of him . . . far away the sound of a lot of human voices . . . a bell . . . hands pushing him toward one of the corners of the big white square . . . another bell . . . the thing moving again . . . something hard landing on him . . . What did it all mean?

Through seven grim rounds Joe battled, often on legs of rubber, always with only instinct to guide him. Strange, that his head felt so big . . . so heavy. There was a buzzing in it . . . something in it . . . but he mustn't stop now . . . he mustn't stop. His fists struck out. A man in a white shirt yelled at him, pushed him away from the thing in front of him. Joe shook his head to get the buzzing out of it so he could hear. He mumbled something. What was the

matter? What had he done? He couldn't understand. Then it all began again. Seeing the thing move back and forth in front of him . . . hearing the dull, faint noises of the crowd . . . going forward, always forward.

Finally, after the nightmare had lasted seemingly for hours, Joe was helped to his feet in a corner of the glaring white square underneath him. His legs carried him across the square again toward the center of it. His hands were at the height of his waist. They wouldn't go up any higher, no matter how much he wanted them to. One of them doubled into a fist and pushed its way out weakly into the night air. It did it again . . . and again. How long must this continue? Suddenly something hit him. He must stand up under it. He must not go down. He must—it hit him again. He backed up. The thing followed him, landed again . . . again . . . again. Slowly, Joe began to sink downward into a great blackness. He landed softly, almost gently. Somewhere far away someone was counting, "One . . . two . . ." Joe shook his head. His body rolled over so that he lay face downward upon the canvas. He was very tired.

## 10. Joe Decides to Begin Again

IN HIS DRESSING ROOM, A SHORT TIME AFTER THE fight, Schmeling was sitting on his dressing table smiling happily. Writers crowding the room, firing questions at Max and little Joe Jacobs. Max said, "I told you so before, but nobody would believe me. He is what you call a sucker for a right. What did you say there? Oh, yes, I would say he is an amateur. I would say he ought to go back to school and learn to box, *ja?*"

Little Joe Jacobs was trembling in glee. Spying Henry McLemore, the only writer who had predicted a Schmeling victory, he pushed him into the running shower, shouting, "It's a gift, kid! It's a gift!" Everyone but Max seemed to have lost control of himself. Several writers were cursing themselves for having been so certain of a Louis victory. Arthur Siegel, of the *Boston Traveler*, was one of these. Schmeling smiled at him. "You should have known better," he said. "I would not have taken this fight if I did not think I, a white man, could beat a colored man."

The smell of liniment in the dressing room was strong. The small room soon became filled with

cigarette smoke also. The door was constantly opening and closing as reporters and hangers-on came to see this new hero. Schmeling was still answering questions. A reporter asked him what his reaction to the two low blows Louis landed in the eighth round had been. Max would not commit himself. But someone else said, "Oh, you can't blame the guy for those. He didn't know what he was doing. Anyone could see that." Later Schmeling was to commit himself. He was to accuse Louis, in an article written for the *Saturday Evening Post*, of deliberately hitting him low.

Arrangements had been made for Schmeling to broadcast to Germany. The crowd in the dressing room became silent as Max went on the air. Schmeling's guttural German sentences were short, but spoken in a tone of exuberance. At the end of the broadcast Max, looking about at the Americans who crowded around him, dropped his voice and said, "Heil Hitler." A short time afterwards he was in possession of congratulatory cables from Joseph Goebbels and the Fuehrer himself.

Across the hall, Joe Louis lay on his dressing table, the left side of his face swollen to three times its normal size, his eyes puffed, and both thumbs badly sprained. "What happened?" he kept asking Jack Blackburn.

"You just got tagged, Chappie," Blackburn replied in a soothing voice. "And when you get hit right, that's all—there ain't no more."

Joe couldn't remember much about the fight. He thought he had been knocked down the first time in the second round, not the fourth. As impressions he had known during the bout came back to him, he began to despise himself, his own self-confidence. They put three ice packs on his face and Joe lay quietly for a while, strangely alone in spite of the fact that a few reporters were in the room talking in low voices to manager John Roxborough. Overhearing some of what they said, Joe sat up. "Did I hit Schmeling low?" he asked.

Roxborough hesitated for only a second. "Yes," he said. "Twice."

Joe, speaking painfully through swollen features, said pleadingly, "Roxy, you go tell him I'm sorry. I don't want to foul nobody. Tell him I didn't know what I was doing." Roxborough left for Schmeling's dressing room without a word.

Joe turned to some of the reporters in the room. "I'm sorry I let you down," he said. They told him not to worry about that. One of them said, "I'm not ashamed to have picked any man who could stand up in there and take one hundred of the hardest right hands I've ever seen on the jaw, twenty-five of them flush." Joe attempted a reply, but found himself incapable of making one. He was so sore inside. He wouldn't have minded the painful throbbing in his head and the aching around his ribs if only he had felt able to quiet his own conscience.

An hour later Joe was dressed and ready to leave

the stadium, flanked by Roxborough, Black, and Blackburn, none of whom was able to muster a smile. Joe turned up the collar on his topcoat, jammed his hands in his pockets, and was about to walk out the door when a reporter asked, "Joe, what about that punch Max landed after the gong rang ending the fifth round? I thought you were coming to yourself when that happened and put you back on queer street." Joe turned, looked at the writer. "He beat me fair," he said. And Louis walked out into the night.

Meanwhile, Harlem was dazed, scarcely able to believe the report of the bout that had come over the radio. "What happened?" Negroes were asking one another. And always they inquired, "Is our Joe hurt bad?" Some of them—World War veterans—had wagered and lost the entire bonuses they had recently received. But even these men seemed to think more about Louis' fate than their own. Was this black Moses whom white people as well as Negroes cheered for and respected to drop suddenly out of the picture? Some famous boxers in the past had left the ring after one bad beating, afraid to fight again, discouraged beyond hope of remedy. But Harlem refused to believe that Joe Louis would follow in their footsteps. "He'll come back," one Negro told another. "I don't care if fight men say they don't come back. Joe won't let us down."

Joe, silent and dejected, arrived in Detroit two days later. The cheering throng that had met him



at the railroad station after former fights was absent. Joe's welcoming committee was at his mother's house—Marva and his family. They tried not to make him feel ashamed. Both Lillie and Marva knew what Joe's silence meant. They decided to wait until he came to them with what was on his mind before they mentioned his career. Joe came to Marva before very long. He told her that he was thoroughly ashamed of himself for having become overconfident. "I should have known better," he said.

"Everybody," said Marva, "makes mistakes." It hurt her to look at her husband's swollen face as she answered him.

"First," Joe said, "I've got to prove it was a mistake, and that Schmeling didn't beat me just 'cause he's a better fighter. Then I've got to prove I won't be so foolish again. I've got to make it right with everybody that counted on me." Marva nodded. Joe looked at her carefully. "Honey," he said, "that means I may be fighting a long while yet."

"That's all right with me," Mrs. Louis replied. And she managed a smile as she said it, for she realized Joe couldn't decide any other way, being Joe.

## II. The Comeback Trail

AFTER THE SCHMELING BOUT, SPORTS WRITERS BEGAN putting Joe's ring name of Brown Bomber in quotation marks. Many of them wrote that they now considered themselves foolish to have thought, a short time previously, that Joe was a great fighter. "The Louis myth" became a popular phrase among America's sports fans. In view of this new attitude toward Louis, John Roxborough's announcement that Joe would fight again within two months of his defeat caused amazement. When Jack Sharkey, the man who had beaten Schmeling for the title, was named as Joe's opponent, many Louis boosters became decidedly worried. Sharkey had proved his ability recently by defeating Phil Brubaker, promising young California boxer.

Joe's training quarters for the Sharkey fight were in sharp contrast to the Lakewood camp, where he had prepared for Schmeling. Only newspapermen were admitted to Joe's sparring sessions, the public being barred from the premises. The camp hummed with activity—boxing activity. Golf was out. Fight experts, watching Joe box against his spar mates, had difficulty in deciding just how badly the Schmeling

defeat had affected Louis. The erstwhile Bomber was now slow and deliberate in his movements. Apparently he was determined not to drop his left hand, no matter what might happen. But was he becoming too self-conscious in the ring? The experts thought so. One newspaper reported on August 10th, eight days before the fight, "Almost to a man, they (the experts) agree that Louis is trying his comeback far too early and against far too shrewd a campaigner in Sharkey."

As Louis trained, his determination to make good all over again increased. Max Schmeling had arrived in the United States aboard the Zeppelin *Hindenburg* after both Louis and Sharkey were in training. He had come, he said, to arrange a meeting with Jim Braddock for the heavyweight title. Before leaving Germany he had said, "The Fuehrer's heartiest best wishes accompany me to the United States." In speaking of the Olympic games, he said German track and field stars who participated in them had all told him they had been inspired by his victory over Joe Louis. "But whenever we discussed the ultimate reason for our success, we all agreed that Hitler's inspiration, more than anything else, spurs us to achievement."

Schmeling's disdain for Louis was quite apparent as the German boxer marked time here waiting for the bout with Braddock to be arranged. He referred to Joe as "the amateur," implied that he was stupid, and that his stupidity derived from the circumstance

of his race. Joe read and heard enough of Schmeling's remarks to make him decide that whatever else he might or might not do in this world, he would prove Schmeling's words and implications false.

He made a good start in this direction in his fight with Jack Sharkey. The crowd of thirty-five thousand that went to Yankee Stadium to watch the bout left convinced that Joe was once more the Bomber. For Joe knocked out Jack in three rounds, so completely out-punching and out-boxing him that Sharkey's best seemed pitiful compared to Louis' skill. Jack failed to land a solid right on Louis during the fight, or to stagger him with any blow. It was Joe's night.

After the bout, Joe lay on the rubbing table in his dressing room, eyes half closed, listening to the crooning voice of Jack Blackburn. "You sure done that Sharkey man up plenty, Chappie," old Jack said as he massaged Joe's back. "Yeah, man. Ain't nobody going to doubt you got the heart to come back now. Leastwise, nobody with sense. How your arms feel? Want old Jack to pat 'em a little?" Joe smiled lazily. He smiled even more when Bill Robinson, his ebony face glowing with joy, came in and proceeded to entertain Joe with a finger tap dance on a Panama hat. "You done it, boy!" Bill said jubilantly, as his swift fingers beat out the rhythm. Joe rubbed his neck reflectively. "Still got a long way to go," he said.

An unexpected break came to Louis a few days

later when Jim Braddock, backed up by reports of several doctors, told the New York State Athletic Commission that he was suffering from arthritis in both elbows and his left hand. "I can't fight Schmeling or anyone else in this condition," Braddock said. The commissioners, on the basis of the doctors' reports, agreed with him, and the fight was postponed until the next year. The postponement was good news to Louis because it meant that the title would remain in this country a year longer. Everyone suspected, and Schmeling did not deny, that should the German win the championship from Braddock, he would take the title to Germany and never give the Negro Louis a chance to win it.

Joe saw in the postponement of Braddock's title defense an encouraging possibility. "Maybe Schmeling will meet me instead," he told Mike Jacobs. "It's worth a try anyhow. More than anything right now, I want to get a return match with him."

Jacobs approached Schmeling, even offering him \$300,000 to take the match. But Max refused flatly. "I do not want your Joe Louis," he said. "I want the title." A few hours after making this statement, Max sailed for Germany on the *Bremen*.

The sports followers of the country were, in general, rather glad to see Schmeling depart. Many had become disgusted with Max for accusing Louis of fouling him purposely; some suspected that he planned to hang the sports title of heavyweight champion in Joseph Goebbels' trophy room, should

he gain the championship; and all of them resented his attitude of superiority toward Americans. As Schmeling's stock fell, Louis' rose. The public had been impressed by the good grace in which John Roxborough's good-will ambassador had taken defeat. The unassuming behavior of the Negro was emphasized by Schmeling's arrogance. White people who had previously shown little interest either in sports or in racial situations began to rank themselves on the side of Louis. They knew he was a good boy, and they liked him because of it.

Joe had three more fights in 1936. Mike Jacobs had been offered the use of the Sesqui-Centennial Stadium in Philadelphia, the stadium in which Tunney beat Dempsey. He obtained the services of Al Ettore, third-ranking heavyweight challenger, as opposition for Louis. The two fighters met on September 22nd before forty thousand spectators. Louis went to work early on the courageous Ettore. In the fifth round he found the range and bombarded his opponent with punches so swift the eye could scarcely follow them. A pair of hard left hooks staggered Ettore. A short right uppercut, landing with tremendous force, knocked him out.

Public opinion began once more to rank Louis, tentatively at least, with the all-time greats of the ring. Joe, hoping to boost his reputation still further, contracted to meet Jorge Brescia in the New York Hippodrome on October 9th. Their battle was short but fierce. In the third round the South Ameri-

can caught Louis on the ropes with a barrage of rights and lefts. Joe fought his way out of distress with a pair of left hooks, the last one catching Brescia flush on the jaw. The two-hundred-five-pound Brescia toppled over like a tower on quicksand. He never moved while the referee tolled "ten."

Joe had planned to tour the country giving exhibitions after the Brescia bout, but he abandoned plans for the latter part of his trip when he was asked to participate in a charity show at Cleveland. Ed Bang, sports editor of the *Cleveland News*, was looking for a drawing card to help attract sports fans to the Christmas fund show his paper annually sponsored. The fund was to be used to help make Christmas merry for Cleveland's poor. Joe agreed to fight an experienced boxer, Eddie Simms, for this cause. The eleven thousand sports fans in the Cleveland auditorium sat back in their seats as the bell clanged the beginning of the bout. Twenty-six seconds later they saw, to their amazement, that it was all over. Louis unleashed a short left hook that hit Eddie squarely on the chin. Simms went down. At the count of eight he arose and groped his way along the ropes. Joe stood aside, not wanting to hit his seemingly helpless opponent. Referee Arthur Donovan walked over to Simms. Simms, his eyes glazed, looked at Donovan and said, "Come on, let's take a walk up on the roof." The referee, seeing that Eddie was indeed helpless and to all intents and purposes out, stopped the fight.

With the Simms bout, Louis ended a year in which he had come back from crushing defeat to regain a degree of the reputation of a superman which he had built up previous to the Schmeling match. He was not, however, thinking of this when he left the auditorium after his encounter with Simms. Already his thoughts were with the new year that was coming. He wondered if he ever would be able to convince boxing experts that he was as good as they had once thought him, and if the chance at the title which he had so coveted must never come his way. Certainly if Schmeling became champion in June, he would ignore Louis' challenges.

Joe didn't begin the new year very auspiciously. In all his career he had never made so sorry a showing as a winner as he did the night he met Bob Pastor in Madison Square Garden. Pastor, a former student at New York University, used his head and his legs to good advantage. He spent the entire ten rounds retreating, sometimes at a run. While Louis chased him and swung at the difficult target he presented, Pastor occasionally slowed his pace long enough to deliver a left jab to Joe's face. The bout turned into a farce. Pastor obviously had been sent in to stay the distance of ten rounds. And he did. There is little evidence that he expected to win the bout by his strange tactics, but he did succeed in making Louis look ridiculous. Joe, in spite of realizing that the experts around the ring were criticizing him severely for failing to catch up with Pastor,



couldn't help thinking the whole affair funny. He grinned at Jack Blackburn when he returned to his corner after the third round. And a flicker of amusement still crosses his face when he recalls the bout. "I'd never do in a track meet," he says.

On February 17th, less than three weeks after the Pastor bout, Joe succeeded in partially erasing the Pastor blot from his record by knocking out Natie Brown in the Municipal Auditorium at Kansas City. Brown, it will be recalled, had previously stayed ten rounds with Joe. In the second bout he lasted only four, thereby supporting Jack Blackburn's contention that "Chappie never makes the same mistake twice."

Meanwhile something had happened that was to have a greater effect on Joe's future than either the Pastor or the Brown bout. For fate stepped in and ordained that Joe, and not Max Schmeling, was to meet Jim Braddock for the world's heavyweight championship in June.

## 12. The Boycott of Max Schmeling

BRADDOCK HAD FAILED TO POST THE FIVE-THOUSAND-dollar forfeit he was expected to deposit with the New York State Athletic Commission to bind his bout with Max Schmeling. Admitting that his arthritis was disappearing under medical treatment, Jim still refused, for some time, to say definitely that he would meet Schmeling. Finally, when he told reporters in November that the fight would be held, he had implied through his manager, Joe Gould, that he might consider meeting Joe Louis before he fought the German. The motive behind Braddock's maneuvering was not difficult to determine. Jim had never made a great deal of money out of fighting. Even the bout in which he defeated Max Baer for the title hadn't drawn well at the gate. Braddock knew that, at thirty-one, his fighting days were numbered. He had a wife and three children to support. A bout with Louis would undoubtedly result in a larger income for the champion than one with Schmeling, who held comparatively little appeal for American fans.

However, Braddock at last gave in and agreed to meet Schmeling June 3, 1937. Max, worried over the

possibility of losing his chance at the title, had crossed the Atlantic again to plead his case before the New York State Athletic Commission. Braddock, also before the commission, begged to be allowed first to meet Louis in a bout in which no decision would be rendered. Schmeling pointed out that should Louis win a bout with Braddock in the opinion of newspapermen, he would be hailed as the unofficial champion, decision or no. The commission told Braddock they would not agree to the arrangement he suggested.

Ostensibly Braddock's agreeing to meet Schmeling and not to face Louis beforehand settled the issue. Actually it did not. For the early weeks of 1937 brought a development which caused Jim to turn his back on the Schmeling match. Up until then, the Non-Sectarian Anti-Nazi League, the American Federation of Labor, and various Catholic and Protestant organizations had voiced disapproval of the proposed bout, even threatening to boycott it. January was scarcely more than a week old when the Jewish War Veterans of the United States, boasting two hundred and fifty thousand members, joined the above organizations, which now announced that they definitely would boycott the bout. "We are going to ruin this fight from a financial point of view," S. W.

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Left: Great action shot shows Louis' terrific power as he sends a right crashing into Billy Conn's jaw. Louis admits this was his toughest fight.

(International News)

Kalb, head of the research department of the Anti-Nazi League, announced.

The League, explaining its action, stated in a paper made available to the press, "Our organization is engaged in combating the menace of Nazism. In conformance with our movement to boycott German goods, shipping, and services, we are opposed to monies from this country . . . reaching Nazi Germany, which can be used by the Nazi government in promoting their armament program, for propaganda purposes, or in a continuation of their oppression of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, labor unions, Masonic lodges, and other groups."

Some of the most prominent men in the country were members of the League. Samuel Untermyer, New York lawyer, was president; James W. Gerard, wartime ambassador to Germany, and Mayor Fiorello La Guardia of New York were vice presidents; and J. David Stern, publisher of the *Philadelphia Record*, was treasurer. Besides the famous, the League numbered thousands of Joe Doakeses among its members, all of whom were determined to block the fight.

Braddock and his manager, Joe Gould, were impressed by the proposed boycott, because it obviously was to become a very unpleasant reality, and Braddock didn't want to risk his title and financial security as well. They were, therefore, open to consideration of a Louis bout. A bid for such a match came from Sheldon Clark, millionaire oil company

executive and president of the Illinois Sporting Club. Mr. Clark offered Braddock half a million dollars, with an option of 50 per cent of the gate, to fight Louis in Chicago the coming June. Braddock accepted with alacrity. He and manager Gould traveled to Chicago where, on February 19th, Jim signed to meet Louis in a bout to be promoted by a Chicagoan, Joe Foley, who enjoyed Mr. Clark's backing. While their managers, John Roxborough and Julian Black, beamed, Louis clapped the happy Braddock on the shoulder after the signing and said, "Boy, it looks like this show will go, sure enough." Louis was to receive a small percentage of the gate receipts, but he didn't care. Now the possibilities of winning the title and, afterwards, obtaining a return match with Schmeling, loomed larger.

Madison Square Garden countered the signing of the Louis-Braddock fight with a court order demanding that Braddock show cause in court why he should not live up to his obligations under a contract previously signed to fight Max Schmeling before meeting Louis. An exhausted process server finally caught up with the elusive Braddock, and Jim went to court to present his case. Shortly thereafter he left for the Wisconsin woods to train for Louis. Finally, five weeks before his scheduled match with Louis on June 22nd, Braddock learned that Federal Court Judge Guy L. Fake had denied a temporary injunction sought by the Garden to prevent the Louis fight. Judge Fake ruled that the contract

binding Braddock to fight Schmeling before meeting Louis "places an unreasonable restraint upon his (Braddock's) liberty."

Meanwhile Joe Louis was training earnestly for the Braddock bout at Kenosha, Wisconsin. Training had begun with his birthday party, as it had before the Schmeling bout, but this party differed from the other one. When little Bill Bottoms, camp chef, brought the cake into the dining room, he beamed and said, "Happy birthday, Joe. Dig right in and eat. Training don't really begin till tomorrow."

Joe smiled at Bill and looked fondly at the cake—topped with rich frosting that set off the twenty-three beaming candles—and shook his head. "Just one medium-size piece, Bill," he said. "Can't take no chances at all." And, shortly after his meal, Joe went out to pound the sands along the shores of Lake Michigan. Roadwork, he figured, was important to a boxer's condition.

Joe's training quarters were luxurious, but the challenger didn't let them soften him this time. The hundred-thousand-dollar brick mansion which he had rented for the training period was filled with rich rugs and tapestries, valuable paintings and bronzes, and beautiful furniture of all kinds. Joe, between sparring sessions and rope skipping, mused upon the strange sequence of circumstances that had put a former Alabama cotton picker into these surroundings. And into the position where he, a Negro, was being backed by a lot of white people to beat a

white man, for Joe's mail contained many letters from white people all over the country who told him they admired his sportsmanship and hoped that his bid for the heavyweight title would be crowned with success.

Louis was pleased that he was undoing some of the damage Jack Johnson had done. He was determined that he would be the kind of boxer and man of whom sports fans approved. He underlined this determination by sending Max Schmeling a promise that he would fight Max if he won the title. Schmeling did not officially reply to Louis' note, only taking care to point out to reporters that Louis had come to him with a challenge, and not he to Louis. But Max, having promised to bring back the title to the fatherland, had little choice. He realized he would have to fight Joe if Joe beat Braddock.

As the attention of the sports world focused on the approaching Braddock-Louis bout, Schmeling, silent about whom he wanted to win, sat back to await developments.

## 13. Winner and New Champion

THE BRADDOCK-LOUIS FIGHT WAS NOT THE GREATEST battle for the heavyweight crown in ring history. But no title bout held more human interest than this one. Likable, Irish Jim Braddock, with a heart bigger than a bucket, in one corner. Sleek, tan Joe Louis, his whole being tingling at the sight of his proving ground, in the other.

While the great crowd in Comiskey Park edged forward in their seats, the bell rang and the fight was on. Braddock came out and jabbed Louis. Joe, boxing cautiously, used the early seconds to study the champion's style. The crowd came up with a roar when Joe, caught with a right uppercut, half slipped and half fell to the canvas. He was up immediately, face immobile, set for action. Braddock came in to him again. Joe jabbed, hooked with his left. As round melted into round, the pattern of the fight became easy to follow. Braddock, game and unwilling to admit he had met his master, led continually. He was determined to extend his challenger to the utmost. If he had to lose, he would lose gloriously. Joe boxed carefully, waited for openings, and shot hard left hooks and an occasional right to Jim's



jaw. By the time the sixth round was under way, the end of the bout was in no doubt. It was just a question of time. A question of how long Jim's pride and fighting heart could hold up his weary, blood-stained body. Joe, feeling respect and pity for the old champion, determined to end his misery as soon as possible. In the eighth round the opening he had waited for all evening came. He pulled the trigger, and the bullet that was his right fist went home. The champion swayed for a second. Joe stepped back. Braddock fell slowly, on his face. Referee Tommy Thomas shouted, "Ten—and out!"

The great crowd rose and screamed their applause. They applauded the great victor and the gallant loser with all their lung power, with all their hearts. They felt they had seen a powerful drama unfold under the bright ring lights. Reporters who had covered bouts since the days of Jim Jeffries stood up behind their typewriters, tears in their eyes, and shouted congratulations to the new king and condolences to the old.

Louis, happy and excited, slithered through the ropes and walked to his dressing room, where he met a host of reporters. Joe smiled at the familiar faces, said, "I got the title now. Come on, let's split it up." He meant that his new possession was too good for one person to keep to himself—that everyone should share in it.

One of Joe's post-battle phrases was quickly relayed to the crowd outside Comiskey Park. "I don't

want to be called 'champ' till I beat that Schmeling," he said. Negroes on Chicago's South Side speedily picked up the saying, repeated it to one another as they slapped each other's backs. Before long Chicago's Negro population were chanting in unison, "Bring on that Schmeling! We ain't skeered, are we, Joe?" Negroes all over the nation celebrated similarly.

The celebrations continued till the day after the fight. It was then that a white sports writer conceived the idea of writing a story about the champion's own celebration. A friend of Joe's confided that Louis was at a certain address in the Negro section of Chicago. The reporter, expecting Louis would be throwing a big, loud party for his friends, traveled at once to the address, arriving about noon. He looked over the house in which Louis was celebrating, found it unpretentious. He knocked on the door. After a short wait, Joe opened the door. The new champion was dressed in old clothes. A white apron was tied around his waist. He greeted the sports writer graciously. "How are you? Won't you come in?"

The writer entered and looked around. Joe led him to the living room. Everything was in order, not a single empty bottle or other evidence of a party to be seen. Joe noticed the writer's surprise, smiled. "Like to sit down?" he asked. The white man sat in a big leather chair and Joe seated himself on another chair nearby. "Maybe you hear some folks out

there," said Louis, nodding toward the door that led to the next room. "Half a dozen of my friends are out there frying pork chops, that's all. Don't let it bother you. Go right ahead with your questions."

The writer, accustoming himself to the neat, sunny room, soon found his tongue. He and Joe talked boxing for about half an hour. The champion answered all his questions quickly, simply. Finally the reporter ran out of questions and was about to take his leave. "You had your dinner yet?" Joe asked. The reporter hadn't eaten. "Well," Joe said, "I don't know if you'd like to eat here or not. But if you would, I think it'll be pretty good, 'cause one of my friends out there really knows how to cook. He's powerful good on pork chops." The writer sniffed the aroma coming from the kitchen. He decided to stay.

"You sit right here," Joe said. "I'll be with you in just a second." He disappeared, to return a moment later with a card table, which he set up in front of the writer's chair. Then he brought in a spotless table cloth, a napkin, and silverware. While he set the table Joe said, "Marva taught me how to do this. You think I'll pass?" The writer admitted he thought the champion was doing "right well." Again Joe went out, to return balancing a well-laden tray. He put it down on the table. It was then that the writer noticed that the table was set for only one person. He was about to ask why his colored companion wasn't going to join him, but Joe's next remark an-

swered the question before it was asked. Said the champion, "I think I got everything here. But in case I forgot something, just yell. I'll be eating back there in the kitchen with my friends, and there's plenty where this came from."

That white sports writer will never forget Joe Louis' victory celebration.

## 14. Joe and Max Get Ready

**J**OE LOUIS HAD TOLD REPORTERS HE WOULD BE A fighting champion. The fourteen heavyweight champions who had preceded him told them the same thing. But Joe was among the few to live up to his word. He contracted to meet Tommy Farr, a courageous and durable Welshman, two months after he won the title.

Tommy amazed the sports world by staying fifteen rounds with Joe on August 30th in Yankee Stadium. Louis had gained such a formidable reputation that anyone capable of staying the distance with him was hailed widely. Welsh Tommy performed the feat by boxing cleverly, employing a darting left jab, and absorbing a tremendous amount of punishment in the process. It was one of Joe's poorest exhibitions. Boxing experts pointed out the fact in no subtle fashion. Said Jack Sharkey: "That's not the same Louis who knocked my head off with a left." Mickey Walker, former middleweight champion, whined, "And to think I gave up a dinner of steamed clams and beer to watch this thing." The opinion of Marcel Thil, then the leading French middleweight, was summed up in two words, "*Mon*

*dieu!"* When the smoke of battle had cleared, Joe praised his Welsh opponent's boxing ability, and announced that he would rest for a while. He took a train for the Middle West, leaving the New York boxing situation simmering.

Max Schmeling had crossed the Atlantic again to see Joe fight Farr. Max and little Joe Jacobs analyzed Joe's ring form and pronounced it "interesting." A few days later Mike Jacobs signed the German to box Louis the coming June. The ballyhoo began. Jacobs' publicity writers did not have to work hard to interest New York sports reporters in the battle. Every writer in New York, and, indeed, in the country, was looking forward to the coming bout with great interest. Those who had so blithely picked Louis to knock out the German in one round during their first fight, reserved judgment for the most part, at least until they saw the boxers in training. But a few, like Richards Vidmer, of the New York *Herald Tribune*, greeted the announcement that Schmeling had signed with unconcealed joy. They regarded the return bout as one which would certainly vindicate their original opinion of the relative merits of Joe and Max. The attitude of the experts was reflected by boxing fans. Most of them were enough interested in the bout as an athletic contest to forget all thoughts of boycotting it. And some of them, like a minority of the boxing writers, were anxious to see Max beaten—anxious enough to forego the boycott.

Louis fought twice more before meeting Schmeling. He put up his title for both Nathan Mann and Harry Thomas to shoot at. The Mann bout, held in Madison Square Garden February 23, 1938, proved little more than mild exercise for Joe. He knocked out Mann with a hard left hook in the third round. He had floored Nathan four times previously. The ease with which Joe won was particularly significant in the light of his opponent's record, which showed that clever Bob Pastor and difficult Arturo Godoy had bowed to Nathan within the last year.

Joe, satisfied that he was working up to another Schmeling bout by keeping busy, next traveled to Chicago, where he met rugged Harry Thomas in the Chicago Stadium on April Fool's Day. The crowd that saw the fight was fooled, indeed. Toward the close of the third round Louis staggered Thomas with a hard right hand. Harry, groggy, started toward his corner, where he sat down several seconds before the bell rang ending the round. Spectators around the ring thought Dave Miller, the referee, would at once disqualify Thomas. But Louis wanted to see that the crowd got its money's worth. He told Miller to permit the fight to continue, as Thomas was anxious to resume his bid for the title. In the fifth round Joe dropped Harry for the last time with a left hook, thus turning back the third man who had challenged his supremacy as champion.

The Boston *Herald* commented editorially shortly after the Louis-Thomas bout, "There are those who

regard the large number of Negro fighters . . . as the 'black menace' to white superiority in boxing . . . there is no menace at all. Indeed, the spread of boxing enthusiasm among the Negroes seems rather to have been a 'black benefit' to the sport, morally and financially." Unfortunately, Germany and Max Schmeling did not agree with the views expressed in the *Herald*.

The attitude of the Nazis toward Schmeling had changed greatly after Max's victory over Joe Louis. When Max came over to fight Joe the first time, there was no fanfare in the Reich. The government expressed itself as rather ashamed that Max would deign to meet a Negro. Yet, having learned that the "superior" German had defeated an "inferior" Negro, all Germany celebrated. Schmeling became, according to some newspapermen who spent the summer of 1936 in Germany, a national hero second only to Hitler. The Fuehrer himself invited Max to luncheon. Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels suddenly discovered that Schmeling was a pure Aryan, although Max once told columnist Westbrook Pegler there was an ancient Mongol strain in his blood. Movies of Schmeling's fight with Louis appeared in German theaters billed as *The Typical Nazi Triumph* and *The Great Nordic Victory*.

Max fought his last tune-up fight previous to meeting Louis in Germany. When he knocked out Steve Dudas, a worn-out American boxer, at Hamburg in April, 1938, the German press hailed his victory as



a magnificent triumph. After the bout, Schmeling received a telegram which read, "Now for the world's championship. Heil Hitler, Yours, Hermann Goering."

Schmeling not only felt that he would defeat the Negro Louis. He felt that he must do so.

## 15. Joe's Greatest Victory

THE EVE OF THE SECOND SCHMELING FIGHT WAS ONE of the most vivid occasions in the annals of boxing. It seemed that half the world had come to New York to watch the German and the Negro meet in Yankee Stadium. Forty-ninth Street near Eighth Avenue was crammed with boxing celebrities and fans. Wandering from one restaurant to another, one could hear of nothing but the coming fight. Jimmy Braddock and Jack Dempsey were in the crowd. "Louis will take him," said Braddock with an air of finality. "Can't see anything but Schmeling," Dempsey remarked.

Managers, trainers, referees, judges, sports writers, promoters, seconds—all the boxing world who could get to the battle scene came. They milled along the sidewalks talking and gesticulating. Many an earnest debater struck a boxing pose to illustrate a point he was making. "Look, what I mean, Louis will do this, and then Max, he'll counter like this. . . ." On and on they argued, while the orchestras played in the restaurants and night clubs, while the bright lights of stores and bars lit up the eager faces of those on the street. Often, very often, the psychological

elements of the contest were brought in. "Max is inspired by the feeling he is leading a new race movement," someone said. "He feels he's Hitler's representative. He'll be hard to lick because of it." But a sports writer took the author aside and said, "Look, I know Joe Louis pretty well, and if anybody's psychology is important, it's his. You know Max has been laughing at him and saying the Negro is afraid of him. Well, Joe doesn't get mad easily, but he's mad now. He's mad at Schmeling's whole attitude toward his race. He doesn't talk much about it, but tomorrow night—look out. He's waited two years for this, and waiting hasn't been easy. Something's ready to explode."

Finally, as the milkmen began their morning rounds, gatherings of boxing men started to break up. Having exchanged information and talked almost steadily for hours, they sought refuge in their homes and hotel rooms. There they awaited night-fall anxiously, eagerly. Odds were established which favored Louis, two to one. Were they sound odds? Few people seemed sure. The very lack of certainty which pervaded the atmosphere heightened the excitement.

At last night came. Swarms of people began to move toward the stadium. A large percentage of them were Negroes, Jews, or other anti-Nazis. They were going to cheer for Louis. Some had been expected to boycott the bout, but their hate of everything Nazi was so strong they determined to go in

the hope of seeing Schmeling "get his." Others of the throng that descended upon the stadium were uncertain whether they should cheer for Schmeling because he was white or for Louis because Max was a Nazi. Most of them, however, leaned a trifle toward Louis. A small minority of those who jammed the subways and "els" that led to the battleground were for Schmeling. Most of them came from Yorkville, the German section of New York.

The air outside the stadium was charged with electricity. The crowd that stood in line before the gates was restless, suspicious, sensitive. It seemed that all their hates and fears were centered that night on Yankee Stadium.

"Who you for?"

"Louis."

"Oh, hell, don't say that. You're too white."

"Schmeling's yellow, like all Nazis. I'd cheer for a black man over a yellow man any day."

So they talked. Their voices swelled in a constant murmur while they walked into the great ball park and, having paid more than a million dollars for the privilege, took their seats. Seventy thousand sat back in the shadows and waited. Below them was the ring. A lighted white square surrounded by darkness, it looked like a huge diamond set in black velvet. Now and then someone would light a cigarette, and the flame of the match would glow briefly, like a firefly, and be gone.

Then everyone grew quiet. The silence was so

profound that each of the seventy thousand might have been praying. The ring was clear. It was precisely ten o'clock, time for the main bout to begin. The atmosphere was more tense than ever. Would this silence ever be broken? Finally, from the back of the stadium, the Negro champion emerged. He glided toward the ring as silently as a shadow. A white towel lay across his bronze shoulders. He was sweating a little, and it appeared that each muscle in his body was obvious to the eye. He passed down the aisle effortlessly, seemingly without stirring the air. Joe Louis was serene as he approached the proving ground.

A cheer began at the edges of the crowd where Louis first appeared, and kept pace with him as he advanced toward the ring, growing from a shout to a roar, and from a roar to bedlam. It beat against the sides of the stadium, ebbed back toward the ring, and then, when Louis climbed into the lighted square, it surged up around him and continued for minutes. When Schmeling climbed the ring-steps it was still filling the stadium, and was reinforced by another, briefer cheer for the German.

Louis sat hunched forward on a stool in his corner, a blue satin robe falling away from his shoulders. He looked ahead into the darkness. There was no emotion on his face, no sign of either fear or courage. Schmeling turned his back to the ring and jumped lightly up and down on his toes several times. The announcer was saying, ". . . former

champion who has thrilled many American audiences, weighing one hundred ninety-three, Max Schmeling!" Max bowed stiffly. The crowd, or part of it, cheered.

"And in *this* corner, wearing black trunks, one of the best known fighters of modern times, weighing one hundred ninety-eight and three-quarters, the Brown Bomber, Joe *Louis*!" There was a cheer. But it died quickly. It was as if the audience wanted to cut things short, to get it all over with. They were on edge, ready. They wanted whatever was to come.

Louis, awaiting the gong, had lost his serenity. He looked lean, in spite of his two hundred pounds, and, perhaps for the first time in his career, he looked eager, even anxious.

"Joe, remember Hitler sent him. Hitler sent him!" shrieked a voice from the outfield.

At the bell they strode swiftly to the center of the ring, and Louis crouched a little, looking like a great tan cat. As he circled Schmeling slowly, seventy thousand people held their breath. Louis began to crowd in. Schmeling sent out a right hand punch which missed. Then the fury in Louis burst forth. He pounced on the German, and Schmeling, his face paper white, stumbled backward. Louis was on him again. He darted out a straight left, then with a twist of the wrist turned it into a cruel left hook. After that the punches came so fast no one could count them.

"Oh, Joe! Oh, Joe! Oh, Joe!" The cry began with

the Negroes in the stands and soon spread throughout the stadium.

Schmeling went down three times. When he got up the third time, his legs were sand and his hands hung useless at his sides. He looked like a grotesque drunk who could neither think nor act. It was then that the referee ended the fight and raised Louis' hand in victory after two minutes and four seconds of fighting.

"Oh, Joe! Oh, Joe! Oh, Joe!" The crowd now came near to having only one voice. It howled and shrieked. It stood on its chairs and tore its hats to bits. It jumped up and down in its frenzy. "Oh, Joe. Oh, Joe." It drowned out the formal announcement of Louis' victory. Seventy thousand people had gone insane.

At the height of the excitement someone shrieked into a neighbor's ear, "Now he can take hisself back to Hitler!" "Back to Hitler, back to Hitler." Was that what the crowd was yelling? Joe Louis stood in the center of the ring, his right arm raised in victory. There was no expression on his face. But there was ecstasy in his heart.

## 16. "A Real Champion"

THE DOOR OF JOE LOUIS' DRESSING ROOM OPENED, and Governor Frank Murphy of Michigan entered. He pushed through the crowd of admirers that was pressing against the champion, who was seated on a rubbing table. Before long Joe spied the gray-haired governor.

"Make way, you fellows, will you?" he asked. "It's Mr. Murphy."

The governor's face was wrinkled into a broad smile. "Thanks, Joe," he said, extending his hand. "Thanks for providing one of the thrills of a lifetime. Michigan is mighty proud of you."

Joe took the governor's extended hand. "I'm glad I could make it short for you, sir," he said, respectfully. Then, smiling, he added, "You know, I feel like a real champion now for the first time."

While Joe continued to receive congratulations from celebrities, sports writers, and hangers-on, Harlem went wild. Men, women, and children crowded the streets to sing out their joy and dance away their excess energy. In the midst of the celebration they hung up signs on the sides of tenement houses reading, "Louis Wins! Hitler Weeps!" They felt this



night belonged to them, and they were making the most of it. Their celebration was typical of those held by Negroes throughout the country. In Detroit's Paradise Valley Negroes danced all night in streets which they had roped off with the consent of the Detroit City Council.

The day after the Schmeling bout, sports writers were hailing Joe's victory as one of the most spectacular in heavyweight history. They could recall no reputable principal in a title bout who had been so thoroughly beaten, so crushed, as Max Schmeling had been by Joe Louis, unless it was Willard when he bowed to Dempsey. And they pointed out that Joe took only two minutes and four seconds to dispose of Schmeling, while Dempsey required a full three rounds to defeat Willard. All the superlatives that sports writers have become noted for were used to describe Joe's prowess. Grantland Rice wrote, in the *New York Sun*, "It was the most sensational attack I've ever seen in the ring." Royal Brougham of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, declared, "Louis can be compared with Dempsey at his best, and maybe he's better." Damon Runyon of King Features Syndicate, said, "That was beautiful. A great job." From Harry Salsinger of the *Detroit News* came the comment, "I think he's the best hitter of all heavyweight champions—murderous." Dave Walsh of the *Philadelphia Record* proclaimed, "It was the finest boxing and hitting that I and Schmeling ever saw."

While the writers threw their bouquets at Louis,

Max Schmeling lay in bed at New York's Polyclinic Hospital. He learned from his doctor that one of the Brown Bomber's blows had broken a transverse process of a vertebra on his right side, just below the kidney. Max was bitter about this injury, which, doctors said, would heal within a few weeks. He was even more bitter about the fight itself. In his dressing room a few minutes after he had been knocked out, he had claimed Louis fouled him. He reiterated the claim as often as reporters approached him.

No American sports writer or boxing expert agreed with Max in the belief Louis had fouled him. The American sporting public, privileged to see motion pictures of the bout for the price of a theater ticket, watched the so-called foul punch land on Max in slow motion, and could see nothing about the blow which was not fair. Yet the Nazis, having banned pictures of the bout from Germany, told Germans that the Negro Louis had won through dishonest boxing. They declared he could not have hoped to beat Schmeling fairly.

Joe ignored the alibis being muttered by the defeated. He was much too busy completing plans for a long vacation to worry about the excuses which Schmeling and Goebbels were making for the Aryan defeat. "I reckon," he drawled to manager Roxborough, "a vacation wouldn't be fun just doing nothing. But you know how I like to see them Detroit Tigers play baseball. Well, maybe I can get some of my pals together and we can play ball like the

Tigers. Or softball, anyway. That's close enough."

Roxborough nodded. Softball was a wholesome pastime, he thought. And so Joe proceeded to hunt up his pals—many of whom he had known since he had come to Detroit from Alabama—and to ask them what they thought of the idea. Twenty-two of them were eager to join Joe's team, "The Brown Bombers," and tour the country giving exhibitions. Joe hired a bus, ordered enough red and gray softball suits to outfit his team, and mapped an itinerary. Before summer was far along, he was playing almost daily under the hot sun. It was great fun to bat and run and slide. It was great to be able to play a sport for the sake of the sport without having to live up to a reputation for proficiency at it. Joe forgot all about being world's heavyweight boxing champion and remembered only that he was a first baseman as he and "The Brown Bombers" traveled from Chicago to Los Angeles, giving exhibitions in towns along the route.

Joe Louis was now as happy as he'd ever been. He felt he had proved himself inside the ring. White people were giving him credit for proving himself outside of it, too. He could find no blot on the horizon. The future, as far as he could foresee, looked as wonderful as the present. Yet, ironically, the man who should have been the first to share Joe's success and happiness was in ignorance of it.

Munroe Barrow, Joe's father, lived on in the Searcy Hospital, an institution near Mobile, inca-

pable of comprehending who his son was and what he had done. Joe had been shocked, shortly after he won the title from Jim Braddock, to learn that the father whom he did not even remember was alive. News came out of Alabama in June, 1937, that J. W. Lane, the sheriff of Chambers County who originally delivered Mun to the hospital, had returned bringing another patient and recognized Mun when he saw him. Joe had contacted hospital officials at once, to make sure that everything possible was being done for his father. He was told that Mun Barrow was as happy as anyone in his mental condition could be, and that little could be done for him. Day after day, Mun played his favorite game of checkers, apparently content with his title of checker champion of the hospital's 1,650 inmates. The outside world held little interest for him.

Joe Louis missed the father who did not miss him. He wished that he could have shared with Mun some of his earnings, which in 1938 totaled more than a million dollars. And when, finally, Mun Barrow died, November 27, 1938, Joe felt the loss of this man he could not remember. He showed how he felt in the only way he knew how to show it—by providing a costly funeral. Relatives from Detroit joined those from the Buckalew region to hear the minister's oration and watch the ornate metal casket being lowered into the ground. The little burial ground at the foot of Buckalew Mountain claimed as a hero the man who had lived in obscurity.

## 17. Four Knockouts

JANUARY, 1939, FOUND JOE LOUIS BACK IN TRAINING. Mike Jacobs had arranged for him to fight John Henry Lewis, then world's light heavyweight champion, in Madison Square Garden. The proposed battle was an oddity in that it was the first fight for the heavyweight championship held in the United States in which both contestants were Negroes. Promoters had long maintained that a Negro fighting a Negro could never draw a gate of any proportions, because most of the crowd came to cheer for the white man in bouts where Negroes were involved. Promoter Jacobs disagreed. "They don't come to see Joe licked," he maintained tersely. "They just come to see Joe."

Previous to the Louis-Lewis bout rumors calculated to stir up interest in the coming fray were, as they always have been before big boxing matches, rampant. Hangers-on at New York gymnasiums were whispering a wide variety of strange stories into the ears of skeptical reporters. One such story was to the effect that Joe was one of John Henry's best friends and intended to let him last the distance of fifteen rounds. No one who had followed the Louis career

believed this "inside story," but it gained space in a few newspapers. Yet another tale concerned John Roxborough, Joe's manager. It was reported that Roxborough was mixed up with the numbers pool racket in Detroit.

The Lewis-Louis bout was ridiculously short, considering the length of time Mike Jacobs' ballyhoo artists had spent selling it to the public. For Joe knocked John Henry out in two minutes and twenty-nine seconds, leaving the big crowd gasping and blinking, trying to realize that the battle was all over. The finish of the affair caused John Kieran of the *Times* slyly to advise Mike Jacobs to get "that gorilla." He referred to the oft-repeated statement of the late Arthur Brisbane, an editorial writer who once put a pair of boxers in their respective places by declaring that "a gorilla could lick them both."

Little Joe Jacobs, who had refused to leave the boxing picture when Louis eliminated his charge, Max Schmeling, from the list of heavyweight contenders, now came up with what he professed to be the gorilla Mr. Kieran wanted brought forth. "His name," said Yussel blandly, "is Tony Galento. He'll murder your Joe Louis."

No build-up in the history of boxing was greater or more artfully achieved than that of Two-Ton Tony Galento, an Orange, New Jersey, barkeeper, as a title contender. All the managerial genius of Joe Jacobs was concentrated upon the task of making the public demand that Tony get a title bout

with Joe Louis. Jacobs posed Galento with beer bottles, beer kegs, steins of beer. The novelty of a boxer who trained on beer immediately won columns of space in newspapers from coast to coast. Public curiosity was aroused. When the New York State Athletic Commission complained that Galento's beer drinking discredited boxing, Tony impudently posed drinking from a milk bottle which manager Jacobs was trying to snatch away from him.

The reason the Galento build-up succeeded as well as it did was that, in spite of his fondness for beer, in spite of his tremendous circumference, in spite of the fact that he was nearing thirty years of age, Tony could fight. If he had not possessed a stunning left hook, a great deal of courage, and a hard right hand, even Jacobs could not have made the public take him seriously as a title contender. But he had these assets. Finally, after Tony had scored a number of quick knockouts and still persisted in drinking beer and referring to Joe Louis as "that bum," the public became interested enough in him to warrant that he be matched with the champion. Joe Jacobs jubilantly pointed out this fact to promoter Mike Jacobs. The latter obtained Louis' consent to the match within a short time, and contracts for the fight were signed on March 1st.

Meanwhile, Joe Louis was thinking of another fight. He was scheduled to meet Jack Roper, a veteran left hook artist, at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles on April 17th. Twenty-five thousand people, many

of them film celebrities, paid \$87,000 to see the match. They were thrilled in the first round when the underdog Roper landed a hard left hook that staggered Louis. If Roper had been able to land a second punch like the first he might have won the title. But Joe was on top of him in an instant. He bombarded his body with punches. Roper sank into the ropes. Within two minutes and twenty seconds of gong time it was all over. Roper, upon being revived, summed up the fray laconically. "I just ziggged," he said, "when I should have zagged."

The Louis-Galento fight was to take place on June 28th. By the time Joe arrived at Bier's training camp in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey, to train for the bout, the air was full of threats which Tony, encamped nearby, was shouting to reporters. Louis, who had once asked, "Why did that fat little man call me a bum?" and received no satisfactory response, decided to go about his business and ignore the insults Galento was hurling across the New Jersey meadows. But when reporters brought news that Galento, noted for employing rough and foul tactics in the ring, seemed to be contemplating using some of them in his fight with Louis, Joe felt obliged to take note.

"You know, Joe," a reporter said, "he's an awful tough guy. He's had every kind of tough job you can imagine, too, from carrying ice to acting as a bouncer. He might try anything in that ring. He knows all the tricks."



Joe scratched his ear, smiled. "Don't forget," he said, "I used to carry ice, when I was a kid."

By the night of the fight, reporters were convinced anything might happen inside the ring, although the chances strongly favored a Louis victory. Most people, according to a poll conducted by the American Institute of Public Opinion, a few days prior to the bout wanted Louis to win. Galento's swearing, beer drinking, and libelous language apparently had alienated as many people as they had amused. Yet there was general recognition of the fact that because Galento's style was unorthodox and because the barkeeper knew no fear, he might cause a great sports upset.

A crowd of thirty-five thousand came to Yankee Stadium in New York to see the bout. Before the four rounds were over they had done everything with their chairs except sit on them—they knelt on them, stood on them, lifted them up and down in their excitement. For they witnessed one of the most exciting brawls in heavyweight history.

In the first round, Galento caught Louis with a left hook, followed by a hard right hand punch. Joe was stunned. But he gained his bearings before Galento was able to follow up his advantage. In the second round the pendulum swung back. Louis took command. He came out with both hands cocked. Toward the end of the round a right and a left to the face floored Galento, who was up again almost immediately. The crowd let out a mighty roar in

the third round when Tony swung a hard left and right to Joe's jaw. Louis fell. He was up without a count. Then, it seemed, it was anybody's fight. But Louis, steadying himself, began once more to take command. He battered down Galento's defense in the fourth round and finished the globular challenger's attempt to win the title with a fusillade of blows that left Tony helpless. Arthur Donovan, the referee, stopped the fight in the last minute of the fourth round.

"He hit me good," Joe Louis affirmed, talking about Galento as he sat in promoter Mike Jacobs' office a few days after the fight. "You got to hand it to that man. Maybe he looks funny and maybe some people don't think he acts so good, but he ain't afraid, and he can *hit*."

"Do you still plan to defend your title again in September, Joe?" a reporter asked.

"Sure do." Louis turned to Jacobs. "Uncle Mike, I want to fight that Bob Pastor again."

Jacobs smiled. "Where have I heard that before?" he asked with a shrug.

"He made me look powerful foolish last time," Louis explained to the sports writers in the room. "I've been pestering Uncle Mike ever since to match us again. A champion ain't no good if he won't fight the hardest ones for him to beat. Besides, I want to prove he can't make me look like a marathon runner this time."

Not long after Joe begged Jacobs to arrange the

Pastor match, Mike complied. There was no doubt that Bob merited a title bout. Since losing a ten-round decision to Louis he had defeated some of the best men in the division. He had gained in cleverness since his first meeting with Joe, and had retained the speed that once befuddled Louis. Jacobs decided to stage the bout at Briggs Stadium in Louis' home town, Detroit.

Joe pitched his training camp at Northville, Michigan, a short distance from Detroit. Because of its proximity to the Motor City, the camp was often visited by hangers-on and newspapermen who had known Joe in the early days of his career, when he was just another ambitious youngster. One sunny afternoon W. W. Edgar of the Detroit *Free Press* dropped in at Joe's camp. Because the *Free Press* sponsored the novice tournament in which Louis won his first trophy as an amateur, Edgar had become well acquainted with Joe and his handlers. This particular afternoon he found Jack Blackburn alone in the dressing room of the camp. Joe was amusing himself elsewhere.

Edgar and Blackburn began talking about boxers. "You know," said canny Jack, "once before, when Joe was just getting started as a pro, you asked me could he beat all the other fighters that held the heavyweight title. I said sure. Then you asked me something mighty embarrassing. You asked me could he have licked old Sam Langford when Sam was in his prime."

"I remember," Edgar said. "You hinted Sam would have beaten him."

"Hinted—that's right," Jack chuckled. "I couldn't exactly *say* so, being as how I trained Chappie. But you know I fought Langford, and I understood just how good he was. Didn't think I'd ever see the fighter could take the measure of old Sam." A smile wrinkled Blackburn's leathery face. "Mr. Edgar," he said, "I take it all back, now."

"You mean an old-timer like yourself is willing to admit a present-day fighter could have beaten the immortal Langford?"

"That's right. Only don't talk too loud. Joe might overhear. Can't let the boy know I think he's that good. I been telling him for years Langford would have boxed his ears off."

Edgar nodded, suppressing a laugh. And old Jack Blackburn, who had earned more money in five years training Louis than he netted in twenty-four years of boxing some of the greatest fighters who ever donned gloves, was content to end the conversation. He had confided his true opinion of Louis to an honest and dependable man, who would retain it and bring it forth in years to come for whatever it might be worth. That was all Jack cared about.

Joe Louis' brothers and sisters had ringside seats for the Pastor bout. Even sister Vunies was able to make it, a vacation from Howard University having happily coincided with the date of the fight. Joe also had invited a cousin from Alabama, Robert Warden, to watch the bout. The Barrow family was delighted

with the performance of brother Joe, who managed to outbox Pastor during most of the bout, and finally knock him out in the eleventh round.

When news of Louis' victory was broadcast over the radio, Negroes poured into the streets of Detroit's Paradise Valley to dance and parade in celebration of their hero's victory. They thronged to the cabarets where they thought Louis might go to celebrate his triumph. They asked each other and everyone they met who appeared to be an authority where Joe was. Meanwhile, Louis, having learned that five thousand excited admirers were filling the streets near his mother's house, took a route he thought the crowd would not expect him to take and finally arrived at Lillie's side door. He sneaked in unnoticed by the shrieking mob outside and slumped into a chair. Marva and Lillie were waiting for him.

"We listened to the radio account of the fight and figured you'd be pretty tired," Lillie told Joe. "Eleven rounds is a long time to box." Joe smiled, grateful that she understood why he didn't feel like talking or, in fact, doing much of anything.

Lillie said, "I know what you need. You need some vanilla ice cream. That's the kind of victory party my boy likes."

Joe's eyes lit up. "I sure would be partial to a dish of that," he said.

But when Lillie returned to the house a few minutes later with a quart of ice cream, she found Joe sound asleep in bed.

## 18. The New Personality

CASWELL ADAMS HAS WRITTEN THAT JOE EMERGED from the second Schmeling fight with a "new" personality. Mr. Adams explains that the victory over Schmeling gave Joe a self-confidence which caused him to open up more, to allow people to know him better. Mrs. Louis once said the same thing, in substance. "After that fight he was less shy, mixed perhaps more. He stopped being the slow, sure, methodical man I had married, and, bolstered by a new belief in himself, began to speak and act more quickly. He stopped planning his actions and weighing everything he was to say. He developed a much more spontaneous personality."

Whether consciously or otherwise, Joe had been trying to acquire this personality ever since he became famous. For he had tried in several ways to make himself a more companionable person. One experiment of this kind began with the hiring of an Indiana schoolmaster, Radford Morris, to help Joe learn some of the things he had missed in school. Morris was with Joe when he became champion, and subsequently went wherever the champion went. When Joe admired manager Roxborough's ability

to do arithmetic not only accurately but very fast, he approached Morris, who "took the champ to school," to teach him the secret of Roxborough's success. Joe learned history, geography, and whatever particularly interested him in any given field, from his tutor. Morris was helping him to lose the feeling of inadequacy which used to come upon Joe when he was in the company of educated people.

Lessons learned from Morris stayed with Joe very well. Louis' memory is noted among Joe's friends as being exceptionally good. Joe has even been described as a walking telephone book, because he has a head full of phone numbers of people he has met from all parts of the country. Joe's memory was also applied to information which John Roxborough, Julian Black, and Joe's secretary, Freddie Guinyard, gave the champion from time to time. Whenever Joe made a grammatical error or showed a lack of manners, as at the table, one of the trio usually took it upon himself to correct him, if there were not many people about. Before long, Joe was correcting himself. Newspapers quoted him as saying, before entering the ring for the second Schmeling fight, "I ain't going to counter him. I'm going to fight him. If I don't, there ain't—ish't—going to be a fight in there."

In 1939, Joe decided that he had acquired enough of the social graces to warrant his becoming a host. He bought a dude ranch of 477 acres near Utica, Michigan. He began improving the place, known

as Spring Hill Farm, with a view to developing it into a summer resort for two hundred paying guests. When Joe entered the United States Army in 1942, his ranch harbored fifteen saddle horses, eleven draft horses, two prize-winning show horses, Jocko and Flash; a herd of Hereford cows, which Joe used to help milk; a goodly number of Poland China hogs, and miscellaneous livestock. The champion himself was studying diligently to become the perfect host, according to a newspaper account, which reported in December, 1939, that he went about his task with a dictionary in one hand and a book on personality in the other. Joe not only was no longer afraid to meet people—he was also anxious to meet them.

Radio was quick to capitalize on the new Louis personality. Joe was asked to appear on a wide variety of programs. He broadcast with Fred Allen, with Gabriel Heatter, and with a number of sports reporters. Joe always held up his end of the assignment with apparent ease. Finally he was asked to appear on a quiz program which was a sort of sports "Information, Please." Scriptless, Joe came through with a lot of correct answers to questions covering the gamut of sports.

Finally, the new personality has earned Louis a reputation of no mean variety as an after-dinner speaker. As Joe gained poise, he found it easier to pass along stories he picked up. He once told a story about George Washington Jones, whom Joe identified as a farmer living near the dude ranch, to sports



writers who had congregated for a dinner party. Said Joe: "This old Jones is a short little wrinkled fellow, and one of those people who are powerful serious about most everything. Well, one night just after sundown he went to get his cow and bring her to the barn. He led her by a rope up to the barn door. But when he opened the door and flashed his lantern inside, guess what? He saw a body hanging by a strap from a ceiling of the barn! Well, old George Washington was telling me about this, and he says, 'I run like sin for about two blocks.' And I say, 'Why did you stop then?' And he says, 'Well, I tell you, I thought the going was pretty tough, so I turned around and—sure enough—Bessie was still on the end of the rope I held in my hand!' "

## 19. Godoy, Paychek, McCoy

TO MAINTAIN HIS POLICY OF MEETING ALL COMERS Joe defended his title four times in 1940. His first defense was what he subsequently described as "the worst fight I made since I won the title." It took place on February 9th in Madison Square Garden against Arturo Godoy, of Chile.

Godoy, a husky athlete who smiled perpetually, stayed fifteen rounds with Joe by crouching, bobbing, weaving, and, according to one description, acting "like a monkey in a zoo." Godoy alternated running away from Joe with coming in toward him, his gloved hands nearly touching the canvas, and arising suddenly like a jack-in-the-box under the champion's nose. Louis, puzzled by Godoy's unorthodox style, was unable to score the knockout he had been expected to deliver in the early rounds.

Part of the reason for his inability to dispose of Godoy was a fear of hurting his hands should he try to punch hard at Godoy's bobbing head, only the top of which was a target most of the time. As the bout wore on and the crowd began to cheer Godoy, who, as an underdog, was performing quite a feat in lasting the distance with the champion, Joe became

disgusted. His disgust reached a peak in the fourteenth round when Godoy put his arms around Joe, pinning the champion's arms to his sides, and planted a wet, resounding kiss on Louis' cheek.

After the fight, Joe, a quizzical expression on his face, told reporters that as far as he was concerned, Godoy belonged in Ripley's Odditorium. Osculatory Arturo, as sports writers promptly named the Chilean, was beaming with joy at having stayed the distance with Louis. The two fighters were still respectively quizzical and beaming when they appeared, two weeks after the fight, on the radio program, "We, The People." Godoy, following the script, informed Louis and the radio audience that he had five husky brothers in Chile. He then added, ". . . Champ, next time we fight, you better watch out."

"What's that?" demanded Louis, reading dutifully from the script. "You want to fight again?"

"Yes," responded Godoy, "if you want tomorrow, I be there tomorrow."

At this point Joe could no longer disguise his feelings with the words of the script writer. "Listen, Godoy," he said. "I'll give you another chance. And the next time you better bring your five big brothers with you!"

As time proved, Arturo might have done well to have taken the champion's advice.

Meanwhile, Joe agreed to defend his title in March against Johnny Paychek, a clever Des Moines heavyweight who was undefeated in his last thirty-

three fights. Louis contracted to donate seven and one-half percent of his pay for the Paychek bout, which was to be held in Madison Square Garden, to the Finnish Relief Fund. While marking time before the bout, Joe received an honor which he prized highly. In a nation-wide poll conducted by the Schomburg Collection of the New York Public Library and the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History, he was chosen for distinguished achievement in the improvement of race relations during 1939. His citation read, "By demolishing all comers he maintained his position as the champion physical warrior of the world . . . demonstrated a modesty and sportsmanship seldom found."

The Paychek bout was a fiasco. Johnny entered the ring pale and trembling. "The last mile," the walk from the dressing room to the ring, was too much for Paychek's nerves. He was unable to remember anything about his own prowess—which was not negligible—and unable to forget anything he had ever read about the punching ability of Louis. When the gong rang, he was ready only to back-pedal around the ring, in the hope of postponing defeat. Joe caught up with him in the second round. His right hand ended Paychek's misery. It was Louis' tenth successful defense of his championship.

Fight fans were thoroughly disgusted with Paychek's actions. Mike Jacobs, who had expected Johnny to prove a much more effective challenger, began to be uneasy. Suppose he couldn't find anyone

else who would put up a good fight with Joe? But as long as Arturo Godoy was clamoring for a second title bout, Jacobs felt he had no immediate worries. He matched Godoy and Louis for a bout at Yankee Stadium on June 20th. Boxing fans, recalling Godoy's first bout with Joe, decided that at least the South American would not be afraid, and began to read the publicity releases that originated in Jacobs' office.

June 1st found Louis in training at Greenwood Lake, New York. According to Doc Almy, sports reporter for the *Boston Post*, Greenwood Lake's citizens have always liked Joe. They have not liked many boxers who trained in their midst, because they couldn't trust them to keep camp attachés in hand, or even to act well themselves. The town's appreciation of the quiet champion became evident a short time before the Godoy bout when a justice of the peace swore Joe in as an honorary justice at Greenwood Lake.

While Joe trained, he recalled that he had fought just a hundred bouts, professional and amateur, since Johnny Miler had knocked him down seven times in two rounds, so launching him on his career. "Maybe," he told reporters, "the first hundred fights are the hardest. I sure hope so," he chuckled.

But Joe's mind was not wholly devoted to boxing. His sister Vunies was to graduate from Howard University. Joe couldn't miss that. So he left camp for a few days and went to Washington to see Vunies re-

ceive her diploma. Joe thought it was wonderful to have a college graduate in the family. He gave his sister a Packard automobile for a graduation present, and told her that if she wanted to do graduate work in history at Michigan University, he'd be glad to arrange it. Vunies decided she would. Joe returned to his training camp refreshed from his vacation in Washington.

"That Godoy man," as Louis referred to Arturo, proved unable to withstand the champion's onslaught as well as he had the previous February. For Joe had figured out Arturo's style, and was able to adapt his own to meet it. Short, sharp hooks and uppercuts wore Godoy down until, in the eighth round, he dropped twice under the bombardment. After the second knockdown referee Billy Cavanaugh stopped the bout, awarding Louis a victory on a technical knockout. Godoy, upon regaining his feet, rushed across the ring and threatened to hit Joe, who was preparing to leave, his night's work finished. But Julian Black wrestled with the Chilean until he had calmed down.

Later, when reporters asked Joe what he intended to do when he saw Arturo ready to swing at him, Louis grinned slyly and responded, "Oh, I wasn't going to do nothing about that. That was Julian's fight!"

A vacation awaited Joe, and he decided to make the most of it. After a brief stay in Atlantic City, where he brushed up on his golf, he headed for Chi-

cago and Marva. He hoped to drop out of the news for a few months and enjoy life in a quiet sort of way as Joe Barrow. And until October 16th he was able to do just that. But on that date, Joe was required to register with his draft board for a possible training for military service. Joe, whose ears had not been deaf to the news of the great Second World War that was taking place in Europe, spoke three words at his registration that made headlines all over the country. A reporter present at draft board headquarters asked Louis whether, in view of the fact that the champion was known to be very fond of horses, he would like to be assigned to a cavalry unit. Responded Joe stolidly, "I ain't choosey."

A presidential election was going to take place in November. There had been a time when Louis would have dreamed of doing nothing more than going quietly to the polls and marking his ballot on election day. But this time he felt differently. He liked Wendell Willkie because, he believed, Willkie had the interests of the Negro race at heart as did few Americans. Joe felt strongly enough about the matter of promoting Willkie's cause to offer his services to the Republican National Committee. Committee officials, who were anxiously weighing possible methods of defeating Franklin D. Roosevelt in his third consecutive bid for the presidency, welcomed Joe with open arms. But they warned him he would have to do some things he had always refrained from doing whenever possible—he would

have to make fairly long speeches before large audiences very often during the next few weeks. Joe agreed.

Louis traveled throughout the country speaking for Willkie. Nothing could stop the champion from helping out the Republican candidate in every way he could. Julian Black told reporters that he disapproved of Joe's committing himself either way on the question of the election, because he felt Louis would lose a lot of admirers who were on the other side of the political fence. "But," he added, "I am powerless to prevent him from following the dictates of his own mind."

Joe's tour took him to New York City, where he made five speeches and missed his lunch because of the full schedule arranged for him; to Buffalo, where a group of urchins on bicycles formed an impromptu guard of honor for him as he rode from the Buffalo airport to the hall where he delivered his speech; to St. Louis, where he addressed a Negro mass meeting. Here the newspapers reported him as saying, "I am just Joe Louis. I am a fighter, not a politician. This country has been good to me, has given me everything I have, and I want it to be good to you and give you everything you need. I am for Willkie because I think he will help my people. I think my people ought to be for him too."

One of the last stops on Joe's tour was Chicago. Although Louis had received a telephone call warning him to stay away from the city, he appeared and



delivered a seven-minute speech. The gangsters who were reported to have made the telephone call caused him no trouble. At Chicago, John D. M. Hamilton, executive director of the Republican campaign, declared that Louis had won more votes for Willkie than anyone except the Republican nominee himself. Whether or not this constituted an exaggerated estimate of the importance of the champion's role in the election campaign is hard to ascertain. Indications after the election were that the Negro vote was quite heavily in favor of Roosevelt. At all events, when election returns were in, Joe, though very much disappointed that Willkie lost, considered that however effective he himself had or had not been as a political speaker, he had at least tried. That was some consolation. When reporters "kidded" him about Roosevelt's victory, Louis would only reply, "The fight is over. I never alibi after a fight."

Joe returned to the boxing wars in December, 1940. And in so doing, he helped bring the first heavyweight championship match in history to the city of Boston. His opponent was Al McCoy, heavyweight champion of New England and Canada, who had been a favorite with Boston ring fans for several years. No one thought McCoy had much chance of winning the title, yet there was little criticism of the bout. John Lardner, then writer of a syndicated sports column, summed up the opinions of most sports writers when he defended the fight by writing,

"He wants to fight. His managers want him to fight. His promoter wants him to fight. . . . And the public wants to pay to see him fight." \*

The Louis-McCoy bout was one of the dullest in which Joe has ever appeared. Al fought an extremely cautious fight, and Joe, showing the effects of a six-months' vacation, was slower than usual. He hammered methodically at McCoy with left jabs interspersed with occasional rights. By the end of the fifth round, Al's left eye was completely closed. The challenger decided to call it a night, and the referee awarded Louis a knockout victory. After the battle Louis told Boston newspaper reporters who congregated in his dressing room, "It was a lousy fight. I'm mighty sorry I couldn't do better. I sure must have looked bad out there."

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## 20. Boxing's "Galahad"

AT THE END OF EVERY YEAR, NAT FLEISCHER, EDITOR of *Ring* magazine, studies the records of boxers who have performed during the year and, on the basis of these records and the deportment of the boxers outside of the ring, chooses the "most valuable" boxer of the year. To this performer goes a gold medal. The boxer receiving the medal must, in the opinion of Mr. Fleischer, have proved during the year that he was "foremost in his contribution to the skill and science of boxing; outstanding in combining with his leadership in the ring a high place as a sportsman; prominent in maintaining splendid public relations and beating down the constant effort to discredit the boxer as a citizen; unquestioned in associating with boxing skill . . . a reputation for clean and moral living; and foremost as an example to the growing American boy."

The *Ring* award for performance in 1940 went to Joe Louis. Joe had also won the award for his accomplishments during the years 1935, 1937, and 1938. But the sports writers of the country were not willing to let Mr. Fleischer's awards alone speak for Joe. During the years 1939 and 1940, many of the best of them wrote their own tributes to Louis for

having helped boxing as, they felt, few boxers had done. Henry McLemore of the United Press wrote, "Fighting is a dirty business as a whole, but the colored boy from 'Bama has done a lot to lift it from the gutter."

Jack Cuddy, also of the United Press, who described himself as one of the severest critics of Joe's boxing ability and one of the few experts who did not accept Louis as a true boxing "great," wrote, "Boxing has always been criticized. . . But Joe Louis . . . has been a brown Galahad—an honest puncher—about whom none of the blackmailers or back-biters even ventured to concoct a story of dishonest performance, and we ask you to name one heavyweight champion during the past thirty years of whom you can say the same."

Perhaps the greatest tribute to Louis as boxing's "Galahad," however, came from the United States Congress. In 1940 Senator Warren K. Barbour, New Jersey Republican, proposed the repeal of a law that had been on the statute books since 1912—a law passed when Jack Johnson was champion, prohibiting the interstate shipment of films of boxing bouts. Senator Barbour had been national amateur boxing champion in 1910, and was regarded as a "white hope." He was, therefore, well acquainted with the racial disturbances accompanying the showing of the films of Johnson's fights. But he explained that conditions in boxing had changed. "The conditions that accompanied the ascension of Jack Johnson to the

title did not accompany Joe Louis," he told the Senate. Congress agreed to the repeal of the statute and President Roosevelt signed a bill that gave the repeal the force of law on July 1st. Boxing men, who had come to look upon the old law as an expression of distrust in their business, rejoiced.

To receive accolades from the hard-bitten men who make a business of boxing seemed to Joe Louis as wonderful as it was unexpected. He said, and rightly, that boxing men should not forget the important roles John Roxborough and Julian Black had played in helping to make him the kind of boxer that could give boxing a new self-respect. Sports writers did not ignore the invaluable assistance Joe's managers had given. Yet they, like the trainers, promoters, managers, seconds, and others in boxing who had closely followed Joe's career, usually complimented Joe alone, perhaps assuming that the champion's handlers would realize that any good word for Joe must reflect credit on themselves. Bob Considine wrote in this vein when, in an article carried by the International News Service, he addressed Louis, saying, "You've been the fairest, cleanest, and most honest fighter any of us has ever seen . . . You've never had an alibi or an unkind word about an opponent, and you've never hand-picked your opponents . . . You're the only champion who ever kept his word and became a fighting champion . . . You've been an inspiration to your race and you've given boxing more than it probably deserves."

## 21. A Fight a Month

WITH THE AL MC COY FIGHT LOUIS LAUNCHED WHAT sports writers ingloriously termed the "Bum-of-the-Month" club. Joe, realizing that he might soon be inducted into the army, wanted to store up as much cash as possible before he entered, because he was land poor, having invested a great deal of money in the dude ranch and other real estate. He therefore fought once a month from December, 1940 through June, 1941. Although all of his opponents were by no means "bums," Billy Conn being a notable exception, few of them were given much chance with the champion. Joe fought everyone who wanted to meet him, the good and the ordinary.

Red Burman, a protégé of Jack Dempsey, had been ranked among the first five heavyweights of the world for the previous two years. He accepted a Louis bout with alacrity, agreeing to meet the champion at Madison Square Garden January 31, 1941. Joe had had little time to get out of condition after his encounter with Al McCoy, but he went into training at Greenwood Lake nevertheless. The title, he thought, was too valuable a possession to lose through taking unnecessary chances of being under

par. The last day he spent at Greenwood Lake before leaving for New York to weigh in for the Burman bout brought something Joe had been expecting for some time—a draft questionnaire. Joe filled it in, stating in answer to questions thereon that he was married and that his mother and younger sister, Vunies, were largely dependent on him. He made no request for a deferment.

When Joe slipped between the ring ropes in the Garden, reporters at ringside were telling one another that they might not see Louis in the famous Eighth Avenue sports arena very many more times. If Joe himself heard the faint notes of a bugle calling him away from the ring wars to a grimmer kind of struggle, he gave no sign of it. His mind was on Red Burman.

Burman lasted five rounds. Joe fought methodically, looking for the opening in Burman's guard that would be his signal to land the knockout. It came when, in the fifth round, Burman left his body unguarded for a second. Louis landed a hard right, and it was all over. Joe returned to his corner to find Jack Blackburn waiting to help him into his ring robe. Jack was chuckling, "Yeah, that was all right. Yeah, man. You done all right, Chappie. Old Jack ain't complaining. One that won't like it is that man Dorazio. Hope he ain't the worrying kind."

Joe was scheduled to meet Gus Dorazio of Philadelphia in the City of Brotherly Love the following month. Contracts for the match had yet to be signed,

however, and Joe planned to go to Philadelphia for the signing within a few days. He could not go immediately because he had agreed to appear at the New York Colored Orphan Asylum. There the champion refereed several bouts between small Negro boys, the program having been arranged for the benefit of the Negro children of New York. The Louis dead pan was notable for its absence as Joe stepped around the ring breaking the youngsters from clinches and chuckling as they swung from the cellar to miss by feet with their heavily padded fists.

Sixteen thousand people gathered in Philadelphia's Convention Hall to watch Joe Louis meet Dorazio. They saw the champion go to work quickly. He "dressed up" Dorazio with left jabs in the first round and knocked him out with a right cross in the second. The crowd—largest to see an indoor sports event in the history of Philadelphia—roared its approval of Louis' form as the champion turned back the fourteenth attempt to take his title from him. No heavyweight champion before Joe had defended his title so many times. Jack Johnson had boxed nine times as champion before he lost to Willard, and, until Louis' record-breaking string of defenses, this record stood.

A few days after the Dorazio bout, it became evident that Johnson was going to try to prevent Joe from adding to his series of victories. He approached James J. Johnston, manager of Abe Simon, who was to meet Louis in Detroit's Olympia Arena in March,



and offered his services as a trainer. Johnston hired "Li'l Artha." Sports fans thought it symbolic that Louis and Johnson should be in opposed camps. And Mike Jacobs' ballyhoo experts made the most of the coincidence.

Joe did most of his training for Simon in the city of Detroit, but he couldn't keep away from his neighboring dude ranch all the time. So he invited sports writers, Mike Jacobs, and various hangers-on to Spring Hill Farm for dinner one day. Joe went out of his way to prove a good host. He had already eaten a specially prepared meal, being in training, but he had great fun serving Mike Jacobs and urging the writers to relieve the big table of some of the food it groaned under. When Mike finished eating, he was approached by Jimmy Johnston, Simon's irrepressible manager, who had crashed the party and remained imperturbable in the enemy camp. "Come on, Mike," said Jimmy, "let's show the champ some real footwork." Whereupon he dragged "Uncle Mike" in front of the gathering and insisted upon doing the Big Apple with him. Louis chuckled as the couple pranced around the floor, admitting they were "mighty good."

Johnston, short and sharp as an epigram, surprised everyone by agreeing that Louis was one of the greatest fighters who ever lived. Before the afternoon was over Jimmy even told a joke that Joe had recently put over on him. The little man, who managed Bob Pastor as well as Abe Simon, related the

story good-humoredly. "You know," he told sports writers, "after Joe agreed to meet my Abe I says to him, 'Joe, after you lose the title to big Abe this March, you ain't going to fight him again right away.' And Joe says, 'Oh, I ain't?' And I says, 'You know what I'm going to do?' 'What you going to do, Mr. Johnston?' 'Well,' I says, 'after Abe is champion I'm going to match him with my Bob Pastor for the title. Now what do you think of that?' Joe thought it over for a few seconds and then he says, 'Mr. Johnston, you're sure going to be a powerful busy man that night, running from one corner to the other between rounds!' "

But as it worked out, Johnston didn't have to worry about a Pastor-Simon championship fight. Although the 255-pound Simon put up a much better battle than he had been expected to wage, he, too, became a Louis knockout victim. Durable and courageous, Simon held off Louis for twelve rounds with a hard, accurate left jab. But in the thirteenth Joe caught up with him. He floored Abe with a right cross. Simon arose only to be knocked down again. When he got up the second time, he was groggy and helpless. Referee Sam Hennessey stopped the bout, awarding Louis a technical knockout.

Tony Musto was the next boxer whom sports writers were to describe as a member of Louis' "Bum-of-the-Month" club. After beating Simon, Joe traveled to St. Louis, where he met Musto in the Arena on April 8th. Tony fought from a crouch

which troubled Joe enough so that the champion was not able to end the fight until the ninth round, when he had so obviously outclassed the challenger that referee Arthur Donovan stopped the fight, saying that so game a boxer as Musto should not be subjected to further punishment when he apparently had no chance of victory. Musto had no complaint. "My best just wasn't good enough," he told reporters.

The day after the Musto fight, two more fights were lined up for Joe. Promoter Mike Jacobs announced that Louis would meet Buddy Baer in May. Buddy, Max's younger and bigger brother, had earned a bout for the title by knocking out Tony Galento in seven rounds. But the big news Mike had for sports fans was that Billy Conn would definitely meet Joe during the coming summer, provided Louis was then champion. Handsome, clever Billy had caught the fancy of boxing followers. Although Conn was, at the time of Jacobs' announcement, light heavyweight champion, and able to fight at 175 pounds, the light heavyweight limit, Mike insisted he would make a worthy challenger for the heavyweight title. And boxing fans, who had long admired Billy's great speed and cleverness, were inclined to agree with the promoter.

## 22. Two Close Calls

IN JOE LOUIS' DRESSING ROOM AT RIVERSIDE STADIUM in Washington, where the champion was training for his bout with Buddy Baer, Jack Blackburn was carefully rolling strips of gauze together and placing them neatly on a shelf. Vincent X. Flaherty, sports columnist for the Washington *Times-Herald*, watched Blackburn as Jack worked.

"Shucks, man!" said old Jack. "Don't you come around asking me could any heavyweight have licked Joe. I *know* they couldn't."

"Not even Jack Johnson?"

"Him! He, he, he!" Blackburn laughed, as if highly amused, at the thought of Johnson's being compared with Louis. "You take it from old Jack. I was fighting same time Li'l Artha was. He wouldn't have no show a-tall with Joe."

"How about Joe Gans?"

Blackburn stopped his work and looked up quickly. "What for you mention Gans? He wasn't no heavyweight. He was a lightweight. I fought him myself."

"Pound for pound, is Joe a better fighter than Gans?"

"Joe's a wonderful fighter."

Flaherty laughed. "Was Gans a better fighter than Joe?"

"Well, now, ain't never been nobody like that Gans. You know, he was different."

Flaherty was laughing loudly. "I've got you in a corner now, Jack," he said.

Blackburn assumed an injured air. "Land sakes, but you reporter men don't care what you ask a body. Picking on an old man like me! Ought to be ashamed." But Jack knew that Flaherty understood the truth of the matter—understood that Blackburn held sacred the memory of Joe Gans, and loved Joe Louis as he would a son. No one could make Jack compare the two as boxers.

The Louis-Buddy Baer bout was one of the most exciting battles in heavyweight championship annals. Baer, at 237 pounds, was in excellent condition, and he made Joe fight fast and furiously to retain his title. In the first round Buddy landed a hard left hook on Joe's jaw that knocked Joe out of the ring, head first, where he dangled for a few seconds, his shoulders brushing the ring apron and his legs entwined in the ring ropes. At the count of "four" Joe was back inside the ropes, ready for action. He kept Baer at a distance until the bell rang, ending the first round. Through the next four rounds Buddy, although getting the worst of the exchanges, kept Louis on his toes anxiously looking for openings. In the sixth round Joe floored Baer for the count of six

with a smashing right cross. As soon as Buddy was on his feet, Louis landed another hard right. He was anxious to end the bout before the bell rang, for time was short. Baer went down. He arose just as referee Arthur Donovan was shouting, "Ten!" Louis catapulted across the ring and landed a last desperate right hand punch as the bell rang. Baer was knocked out. His manager claimed the blow landed after the bell had rung and was therefore a foul, but referee Donovan refused to admit the claim. When Buddy proved unwilling to go into the seventh round, Donovan disqualified him and declared Louis the victor, while the spectators roared and screamed in excitement.

Many boxing experts decided, after the Baer fight, that Louis was slipping. A not insignificant number of them picked Billy Conn to defeat the champion on June 18th in New York's Polo Grounds, where the Negro and the Irishman were to fight. Conn, they pointed out, was so clever that some fight experts had even compared him in ring skill with the Corbett who defeated John L. Sullivan. He was admittedly faster on his feet than Joe. And no one could doubt that Billy honestly believed he would win the title. His confidence in the face of Louis' formidable reputation was amazing.

Cocky was the word for Billy. And his very cockiness won him many admirers. Billy laughed at the idea that Louis might knock him out. "I'm too smart for him," he said. "I think too fast. I move too fast.

I box too well. I'll confuse him with my fast footwork and left jab. I *know* I'll beat him." Conn announced all these things eight months before he entered the ring with Joe. But most of his conversation consisted of boyish expressions such as, "Gee, when I'm champion, there isn't going to be a limit on anything. I'll really be living high then." Billy grinned. "Not that I'll do foolish things, you know, only have fun." There was no "if" in the Conn vocabulary when he talked of his chances of defeating Louis.

The day before the Conn-Louis bout a poll conducted by a press association showed that eleven sports writers out of thirty-three interviewed picked Billy to win. As with the experts, so with the bookies. They established Joe a three-to-one favorite. Wagering was brisker than it had been on most Louis fights. Trainloads of fight fans from all over the country began to arrive in New York several days before the bout, and many of them were anxious to bet in support of their convictions. A large delegation from Pittsburgh, Billy's home town, appeared, praising Conn to the skies and looking for bets. When the day of the fight arrived, the respective merits of the two boxers were being hotly disputed in hotel lobbies, barber shops, subway trains—in fact, wherever boxing fans met.

Just before the first preliminary bout went on, arguments flew thick and fast outside the gates of the Polo Grounds. Most of them were good-natured.

Conn's supporters apparently had themselves acquired some of their hero's laughing confidence. Discussion of the relative merits of the boxers continued long after most of the sixty thousand spectators were in their seats. It was as if they were unwilling to await the battle and let it settle points of contention. Each felt under a special obligation to win the fight for his favorite before, in fact, the fight had begun.

When the boxers were in the ring, someone remarked, "Conn looks small." Billy did appear small compared to the champion, who outweighed him by twenty-five and one-half pounds. But he didn't give the slightest indication of fear. And when the bell rang he danced out to meet Louis with jaw set and eyes snapping. Joe won the first two rounds. But he learned that Conn did not intend to restrict himself to clever boxing, in the fashion of Bob Pastor. For slim Billy opened up and slugged briefly with Louis in the second round. He acted then as if he weighed all of the two hundred pounds that Louis boasted.

In the third and fourth rounds Conn made the big crowd gasp at his skill and courage. Traveling about the ring with lightning speed, he flicked left jabs and stinging left hooks into the champion's face. Jab, hook, move—that was Billy's formula. Louis' answer came when, in the fifth round, the champion subjected Conn's body to a heavy bombardment. Joe's purpose was to wear Billy down, and slow him up. But Conn traveled several more rounds at top



speed before he began to show the effects of Joe's strategy.

Billy came on strongly to take the eighth, ninth, and eleventh rounds on most score cards. The crowd was becoming more tense by the second. How long could he keep it up? Was the miracle that Conn had forecast truly to take place? It seemed as if it might. For Joe appeared to be tiring, while the laughing, wisecracking Conn piled up points. Toward the end of the twelfth round Conn threw caution to the winds and unleashed a savage assault. While the crowd roared its astonishment, the slim Pittsburgher rocked Louis with left hook after left hook. When the gong rang Louis was staggering, apparently on the verge of defeat.

The only way, apparently, in which Joe could win was to score a knockout. Both judges of the bout gave Billy credit for having won a majority of the rounds that had been fought. It seemed to sports writers that if the fight lasted the fifteen rounds which were scheduled Billy could certainly win on points from a tiring Louis. When the thirteenth round began Louis glided from his corner with Jack Blackburn's warning words sounding in his ears: "You got to knock him out to keep your title." Joe met Billy with a left jab that drew blood from Conn's nose. Billy responded with a flurry of punches, hoping to finish the fading champion. But Louis stood up under them. He landed a right uppercut that snapped Conn's head back. Billy

dropped his guard. Joe stepped in with a series of lefts and rights that came too fast to be counted. Then he shot across a crushing right. Conn fell, face downward. As referee Eddie Joseph counted ten over him, an Irishman's dream evaporated. And sixty thousand people shrieked their applause for the champion that was and the champion that almost was.

## 23. "We're Going Home"

WHEN LOUIS LEFT THE RING AFTER THE CONN FIGHT, he saw manager Roxborough, who had been sitting at ringside in an agony of suspense until the knock-out. Louis smiled at him. "Hello, Roxy," he said. "Swallow your cigar?"

But Joe was not as blithe as this joke might lead one to believe. He realized that Conn had nearly won the title. And after spending half an hour discussing the fight in his dressing room, Joe told reporters he thought he had been fighting too often. He said he would take a vacation before meeting Lou Nova, a former college student with an impressive record, in September. As it turned out, he spent some of the vacation in court.

Marva had asked to be permitted to accompany Louis to training camps and felt hurt when Joe told her it wouldn't work. Marva wanted to be with Joe, to share the spotlight with him, to gain attention as the wife of a celebrity. It was hard for her to understand, as it has been hard from time immemorial for boxers' wives to understand, why he didn't want her to go. Jack Blackburn would have turned purple at

the very idea. He knew that the easiest way of assuring defeat for a boxer was to permit him to take his wife to his training camp. Another fight trainer once summed up the opinion of boxing men when he said, "Once the little woman of a fighter arrives, it ain't a training camp no more."

Joe was sorry that Marva was disappointed. He arranged to meet her in Chicago after the Conn fight. Unfortunately, he was unable to make it, and suggested that she meet him instead in Detroit. Marva, feeling neglected and hurt, refused. She was angry now—angry enough to go to her lawyer and file a suit for divorce, charging Louis with cruelty. She declared the champion had struck her twice in recent months.

Joe was playing golf on a Detroit course when a reporter drove up, jumped out of his car, and approached the champion. He wasted no time. "Your wife has just sued you for divorce," he said. "What are you going to do about it?"

"She's what?"

"She wants to divorce you. Says you hit her twice." Louis, his golf score card still in his hand, gaped incredulously. Finally he said, "I just don't believe it. Must be another rumor." He paused, then asked, "Why would she say I hit her? Whatever would I want to hit her for?"

At first Louis declined to contest the suit. If Marva had found life as the champion's wife tedious, he didn't feel he had a right to do so. "If she doesn't

want to be my wife any more," he said, "I ain't going to try to make her."

Later Joe changed his mind. His managers told him Marva demanded half of Joe's money and property and half of all he would acquire in the future, as alimony. Joe, who was land poor, simply couldn't afford it. Moreover, his wife's extravagant charges and demands led him to believe that she had filed the suit in a burst of anger, rather than as the result of pondering her situation as a married woman. There might, then, be hope of reconciliation. Joe instructed his lawyer to take the case into court at Chicago.

Probably a more apathetic pair of opponents in a divorce case never took the witness stand, or were interviewed by the press. Joe, at one point in the proceedings when he felt his attorney had spoken sharply to Marva, leaned over and remonstrated with him. And Marva took pains to explain to reporters who asked about the charge that Joe had struck her, "Well, one has to have some grounds in order to get a divorce." To determine how much alimony the champion should pay his wife, the Louises appeared before Dwight S. Bobb, Master in Chancery, in the latter's office. The morning of the second day the alimony was to have been discussed, the attorneys representing both parties stated neither litigant wanted to continue the legal battle. The Louises agreed to confer in an adjoining room.

About an hour later they re-entered the office. Joe was carrying Marva in his arms.

"Hey, what's happened?" demanded reporters as photographers took pictures of the beaming couple.

"What does it look like?" asked the delighted Louis. "Why, it's just like getting married all over again." Whereupon he carried his laughing wife from the room. "We're going home," he called back over his shoulder.

## 24. Joe Foresees Induction

**B**ECAUSE HIS MARITAL DIFFICULTIES WERE NOT SETTLED until mid-August, Joe asked Mike Jacobs to postpone the Nova fight ten days, so that it would take place September 29th. Mike agreed.

Three days after opening training at Greenwood Lake, Louis received news that he had been expecting for some time. His Chicago draft board had reclassified him, taking him from the 3-A category deferred because of dependents, and placing him in the 1-A group described as eligible for immediate induction into the army. Joe did not seem at all troubled. "If they want me, I want to go," he said.

Louis entered the ring a three-to-one favorite against Nova, as he had against Conn three months previously. But although the public (or the betting part of it) did not think Nova had much of a chance against the champion, the challenger's adherence to Yoga philosophy had gained him a large following who came to his bouts partly out of curiosity to see what a yogi looked like. Nova's insistence that through practicing the Yoga philosophy he had developed a "cosmic" punch and a "dynamic" stance had gained headlines throughout the country. When

Louis and Nova faced each other across the ring in the Polo Grounds, fifty-six thousand boxing fans were in the stadium, anxiously awaiting the opening round. They wanted to see Nova try his punch and stance against Louis. And they were hopeful that the bout would answer the question of whether Louis had slipped. They saw Joe stalk his opponent through five rounds, cautious, deliberate. Then, as the pattern of the bout began to become clear, the crowd relaxed, became less vigilant. They were shocked out of their seats when suddenly in the sixth round Louis leapt at Nova and landed a long right hand punch which ended the bout. Nova went down. He arose at the count of nine, groggy and helpless. Referee Arthur Donovan awarded Louis a knockout.

Discussion after the bout centered not upon whether Louis had slipped as a boxer, but upon the possibility of his being inducted into the army in the near future. Joe seemed to believe that he would be in uniform before long. The Department of Race Relations of the Federal Council of Churches announced the night of the Nova fight that the champion had written friends he expected to be called soon into military service. The news was released in connection with the fact that Joe had offered to sponsor a Joe Louis fund for the Department. He had written that early retirement from the ring was possible in view of the apparent imminence of induction into the army. "But before I retire," he had



said, "I want to put up one more fight—the best of my career—to help my people. The hardest fight I ever had was against prejudice and intolerance. My people know what I mean. They are all fighting their way up, and I want to open the door of opportunity a little wider for them. I propose to start with my own contribution."

Boxing was stirred by the news that Joe was thinking of retirement. Sports writers debated about whether Louis would retire simply for the duration of his military career or forever, if he should be called to the colors. On October 14th a newspaper story reported that Joe's draft board physicians had found the champion physically fit for service.

## 25. The Fight for the Navy

**M**IKE JACOBS, IN THE FALL OF 1941, WAS APPROACHED by an officer of the United States Navy who requested that Jacobs promote a boxing bout for the benefit of the Navy Relief Fund. Mike, who knew that the fund provided for emergency situations which naval personnel and their families might meet, liked the idea. He got in touch with Joe Louis. Joe said he would defend his title in Madison Square Garden for the fund, foregoing all remuneration. Buddy Baer agreed to box Louis, giving part of his pay to the fund. The match was arranged for January 9th.

Promoter Jacobs charged thirty dollars for ring-side seats. Within a few days he was beaming as ticket orders arrived in his office by the basketful. "And the names," he chuckled happily. "The names of these people that are coming! Why, a lot of them are too big to be in *Who's Who*, even. So what if they can't tell which is Louis? It's a good cause. That's the important thing. Why, I'm getting more fun out of this than out of fights that netted me a lot." Jacobs, like Louis, was donating his services free of charge.

At Greenwood Lake, fight experts noted that Louis appeared sharper and better in training than he had for many months. There was a purpose behind Joe's gloves that spurred the champion to magnificent boxing. The purpose was revealed when a reporter asked Joe how it felt to be fighting for nothing. A surprised expression appeared on Joe's face. "Ain't fighting for nothing," he replied. "I'm fighting for my country." Pearl Harbor had made a deep impression on Louis.

John Roxborough felt very proud of his "ambassador." He looked forward to Joe's fight with Baer. For he felt Joe was now in a position to help his people perhaps more than he ever had. Louis' generosity and patriotism were being widely heralded in the nation's newspapers and magazines. Roxborough, as usual, remained in the background. Louis was the symbol white people had come to admire. Louis was the man to keep in the spotlight. He, Roxborough, was content with the knowledge that this "ambassador" was in large part his own creation. He did not care if no one else understood his role in the making of Louis. In fact now he rather wanted to be ignored. A case involving Roxborough was soon to be decided in a Michigan court, and he did not want people to associate it in any way with Louis.

Just before the call came for Joe to enter the ring against Baer, the champion sat on his dressing table in Madison Square Garden, looking worriedly at Jack Blackburn. His old trainer sat near him, legs

drawn upward, gasping for breath. "What is it, Chappie?" Louis asked, trying to keep worry from his voice.

"That old arthritis got me again," responded Blackburn. As he spoke the pain lessened somewhat, and he breathed more easily.

The call came for Louis to start for the ring. Blackburn looked at the big, tan boy beside him. "Reckon this time you better go alone, Chappie," Jack said. "Don't think I could make it up them ring steps."

Louis put a hand on his trainer's shoulder. "Look," he said, "I wouldn't be no good out there without you. Besides, I promise you won't have to go up the steps more than once." Blackburn saw the determination in Joe's eyes and agreed to go with him.

When Louis and Baer were sitting in opposite corners, Wendell Willkie was called into the ring. Mr. Willkie made a brief speech, part of which was addressed directly to Louis. "Thank you, Joe Louis," he said, "in the name of the United States Navy and the American people. Thank you for your magnificent contribution and generosity in risking for nothing a title you have won through blood, sweat, and toil."

Louis, inspired by Willkie's speech and mindful of his promise to Blackburn, met Baer with a fusillade of blows. They came so fast they could not be counted and did their work so well that Baer was unable to land an effective blow of his own. Baer

went down three times. The last time he was counted out. The bout had lasted only two minutes and fifty-six seconds.

John Roxborough stood just below the apron of the ring, his head bowed and his eyes damp. This was a moment of which he had dreamed for many, many years. His "ambassador" had unquestionably become a reality. The loud applause of the tremendous crowd sounded in his ears. But above it, Roxborough still heard Willkie's words, "Thank you, Joe Louis . . ." John Roxborough, in this moment of greatest triumph, was unable to conceal his emotion. He wept for Louis' accomplishment and, in the same tears, for his own failure. Two days before he had been convicted of dealing in policy slips and sentenced to a term of two and one-half to five years in Michigan State Penitentiary.

## 26. The "Champion Citizen"

THE DAY AFTER THE BAER FIGHT LOUIS RECEIVED notice that he must appear before his Chicago draft board for induction into the army. Joe requested a transfer to a New York board for examination, voluntarily waived all notices and delays, and said he was ready and willing to enter the service at once. "I was going in anyway," Joe told newspaper reporters, "so I figured I might as well get it all done at once right now. I don't know what they're going to do with me, but it don't make much difference. I'll give my best and hope to be a good soldier." Joe couldn't resist adding a joke. "Hope I do just as good a job for Uncle Sam as I did for Uncle Mike," he said, referring to Jacobs.

A few days later Louis was scheduled to go to Governor's Island for an exhaustive physical examination preparatory to actual induction into the army. Reporters and photographers groaned when they learned that Joe would leave for the Island at eight in the morning. But nevertheless, they met him in force at the appointed hour, and accompanied him across the river. Once at the scene of the examination, photographers ordered majors and

captains about with abandon, telling them to move so that they could better photograph the champion while his eyes were being tested and his chest thumped. Colonel H. Clay Supplee, head of a morale division, accompanied Louis back to New York.

The next day Louis was formally inducted into the army at Camp Upton on Long Island. While reporters swarmed over the camp taking notes on the movements of the champion, and Major C. Allen Putt, commanding officer of the camp's induction center, discussed Joe's future in the army with interviewers, the soldiers at Upton took the addition to their ranks very much in stride. Their enthusiasm was only aroused when they learned that another Joe—one Joe Vernuccio—had arrived at the same time as had Louis. Vernuccio was reputed to be an excellent army chef.

Yet there was no lack of appreciation of the sacrifice Joe made by donning a uniform. The *New York Times* pointed out that Louis was probably losing his most lucrative boxing years by entering the army. "He is cheerfully giving up that much, minus his army pay, to serve his country. If any of us resent our present and prospective burden of war taxes we might think of Joe Louis' contribution. His championship now is more than of the prize ring: he is a champion citizen."

Meanwhile, expressions of appreciation for Joe's gift of his purse for the Baer fight were still being made. One of the most notable was spoken by

United States Senator Prentiss Brown of Michigan, on the Senate floor. Senator Brown said that Louis' sportsmanship and unequalled physical endowments, retained and increased by clean living, "are now crowned with supreme generosity. Joe Louis is a citizen of whom Michigan and the nation are proud." Wendell Willkie, speaking at a Freedom House dinner some time after the fight, pointed out that Louis' contribution was very significant in the light of the fact that Negroes were then eligible to accept only menial positions in the navy. Mr. Willkie suggested that Louis' gesture should constitute answer enough to those who still asked why the ban on Negroes in the navy should be lifted.

Perhaps the tribute that made the deepest impression on Joe himself was paid by the New York boxing writers. Sports reporters, many of whom have been accused of belonging to the "aw, nuts" school of journalism, admittedly waxed sentimental about Louis now that it became apparent he was soon to leave the boxing scene. They had, in December, 1941, voted to him the Edward J. Neil Memorial Plaque for having done more than anyone else for boxing in the year then drawing to a close. They decided to present Louis with the plaque in mid-January at a dinner and meeting of the New York Boxing Writers Association, to be held at Ruppert's in New York.

Army and navy officers were present at the dinner. So were James A. Farley, former postmaster general,



who presented Louis with a desk set on behalf of the writers; J. Edgar Hoover of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; John Reed Kilpatrick, president of Madison Square Garden; Gene Tunney, who dropped his usual conservatism and called Louis the greatest fighter he had ever seen; and James Walker, former mayor of New York, the speaker of the evening. Lieutenant-Colonel Howard C. Brenizer, commander at Camp Upton, sent a telegram expressing regret that he had to miss the dinner and stating, "Joe is going to make just as good a soldier as he is a champion."

When Walker arose to present the Neil plaque to Louis, the boxing writers who sat in front of him were in a mood to hear the champion praised. They had come to praise him. Walker sensed that the guests in the room felt very much as did the writers. He knew that his audience wanted to hear a warm, sentimental speech. And he proved equal to the occasion. "Joe," he said, "all the Negroes in the world are proud of you because you have given them reason to be proud. You never forgot your own people. You are an American gentleman."

"When you fought Buddy Baer and gave your purse to the Navy Relief Society, you took your title and your future and bet it all on patriotism and love of country." Walker paused, conscious of the hush about him. "Joe Louis," he said, slowly and impressively, "that night you laid a rose on the grave of Abraham Lincoln."

Louis, upon hearing these words, left his chair and stepped in front of the microphone to receive the plaque. His speech was simple. "You don't know how you make me feel. I feel good. I never thought I'd feel so good as I did when I won the heavyweight championship of the world, but tonight tops them all. I feel better than I ever felt in my life.

"I want to thank each of you for what you have done for me. I want to thank Mike Jacobs for what he did for me. I want to thank the boxing commission for what it did for me. I hope I never did anything in the ring I'll be sorry for in years to come."

## 27. Blackburn's Death

LATE IN FEBRUARY ARMY OFFICIALS AND MIKE JACOBS announced that the recent Louis-Baer bout had been so successful in raising money for the Navy Relief Fund that Joe had been asked to risk his title, again without remuneration, for the Army Emergency Relief Fund. And Joe had accepted.

Abe Simon, who had lasted thirteen rounds with Louis a year previously at Detroit, was selected to face the champion. Simon was to receive 12½ per cent of the gate receipts, the same percentage that Buddy Baer had taken. And Mike Jacobs, who again was donating his services free of charge, prepared his office staff for a deluge of mail from "them Who's Whoers" who would most certainly want to be in Madison Square Garden the night of the fight, March 27.

Louis, in compliance with army orders, left Camp Upton for Fort Dix in New Jersey, where he trained for the bout. A routine was mapped out for the champion that kept him very busy. Every day Joe got up at six o'clock to do roadwork. At 10:30 A.M. he reported to Corporal Robert Sherman, who drilled Joe daily in the manual of arms, marching, military

courtesy, and other matters the knowledge of which he deemed essential to a soldier. At 1:30 P.M. Joe went regularly to the field house, where he donned boxing trunks and sparred. Usually two thousand soldiers who were off duty filled the stands near the ring and watched Louis box. Joe was in bed every night by 10:30.

Missing from Joe's work was some of the zest he had shown while preparing himself for the bout with Baer. The reason was not hard to find. Jack Blackburn, suffering from acute arthritis, was absent from Joe's training camp for the first time in the champion's professional career. At first it appeared possible that Blackburn might be able to come to the camp a week or two before the fight. Jack even telegraphed Louis from Hot Springs, Arkansas, that he was on the road to recovery and expected to be with Joe soon. At this news Louis was delighted. "Hot dog!" he told his assistant trainer, Manny Seamon. "Chappie's coming!" But Joe's elation didn't last long, for Blackburn contracted pneumonia and was taken to a hospital in Chicago.

Joe was pleased that many of his soldier buddies appeared anxious to see the fight. Upon learning that most of them didn't have money to spend on tickets, Louis went into his own pocket to buy \$3,000 worth of tickets for them. Al Laney, of the New York *Herald Tribune* sports staff, happened upon this information in Mike Jacobs' office when Louis telephoned Mike to ask him to reserve twenty-five more

tickets. Up until then Private Louis' good deed had been a secret between Joe and Jacobs. The private apparently hadn't considered it important enough to mention. And the promoter had refrained from releasing the information for fear he would be charged with pulling a publicity stunt in connection with the charity show.

The lights above the Madison Square Garden ring shone down brightly upon Joe and giant Abe Simon sitting in opposite corners of the white diamond. Under-Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson was addressing a near-capacity crowd from the center of the ring. When he referred to Louis as "a fine soldier and a truly great champion," the crowd roared its approval. Patterson's speech was brief. After the singing of the National Anthem the stage was set. Louis and Simon shed their ring robes and awaited the gong.

Joe wasted no time in getting to work on his big opponent. Toward the end of the second round he floored Simon, who apparently was saved from a knockout by the bell. Joe again dropped Simon in the fifth round, only to have the bell interrupt the referee's count once more. Determined to be frustrated no longer, Louis caught Simon with a right and left to the jaw just six seconds after the sixth round began. This time Abe was declared "out" by referee Eddie Joseph, who completed the count before Simon regained his feet.

Joe was called to a radio microphone as soon as

his hand had been raised in victory. His first words were, "I want to send greetings to all the soldiers in Australia under General MacArthur and wish them Godspeed."

Jack Blackburn, lying in Chicago's Provident Hospital, heard Joe's voice. The radio beside his bed had brought him a description of the whole fight. Blackburn had lain very still throughout it. When the bout began and when Joe scored the first knock-down, Jack's breathing had quickened. Otherwise he had shown no emotion. Now a tear oozed out of his eye and ran down his leathery cheek. He heard Joe say, "I hope you're satisfied, Chappie."

Jack smiled, showing golden teeth, and turned his face toward the loudspeaker. "I sure am," he said.

Although Louis had not admitted it to Blackburn, he knew that Jack would never leave his bed. Blackburn knew it, too. Before he had stepped into the ring with Simon, Joe talked to Blackburn on the telephone. He told the old trainer he expected him to be with him for the next fight, "and if you can't make it to the ring, I'll carry you there." Jack played the game with Louis. "All right," he said, "it's a go."

A month went by before death claimed Blackburn. He succumbed from a heart attack in his Chicago home on April 24th. Louis received a furlough from his army duties at Camp Upton to attend the funeral in the Pilgrim Baptist Church of Chicago. He had the satisfaction of feeling that Blackburn

would have been proud of the funeral he received. Five thousand people sat in the church. Before them lay the body of the battle-scarred trainer, resting in a magnificent casket which was banked by fifteen automobile loads of flowers. The Reverend J. C. Austin read the eulogy. "Think not that Jack Blackburn has left the ring," he said. "Think not that he has deserted the man who was the best work of his genius, mind, and soul. He will be at the next fight and will lean over the ropes as usual to whisper into his charge's ear, 'Keep up the shuffle I taught you. Remember you were born with two strikes on you. Swing with the third and don't foul out.'"

It was hard for Joe to recover from the shock of "Chappie" Blackburn's death. Back at Camp Upton, he decided to try to devote himself whole-heartedly to army activities. Work appealed as the best medicine for heartache. In May, Joe received the good news that he had been promoted to the rank of corporal. Also in May an article by Paul Gallico appeared in *Liberty* magazine. It was later printed in the *Reader's Digest*. Gallico, who had previously described Louis as a "mean man," more than made amends in his latest piece. He said, "Years ago I wrote that this same Barrow, known professionally as Joe Louis, was a 'mean man.' Then he was a primitive puncher just emerging from the pit. Somewhere on the long hard road from rags to riches Joe Louis found his soul." Gallico described the good

spirit in which the champion had entered the army and agreed to serve it in any way he could. He closed the article by declaring, "Citizen Barrow has set us a lesson. Can we learn it, we are saved. Should we ignore it, we shall reap what we deserve."



## 28. The Soldier Louis

WHEN JOE LOUIS WENT INTO THE ARMY, REPORTERS could draw from him no statement of what he wanted to do in uniform. "What the army says—that's all," Joe insisted. The army apparently decided that Joe could be of more use if he capitalized on his boxing ability and popularity than if he continued to go through the mill with his buddies as Corporal Barrow. This decision became apparent when the Corporal was ordered to appear in exhibition bouts at Camp Upton and the Polo Grounds for the Army Emergency Relief Fund.

By the summer of 1942, the War Department announced that Louis had been so busy giving exhibitions calculated to boost soldier morale and contribute to various relief funds that he had not yet completed his basic training. Joe was therefore ordered to a cavalry replacement center at Fort Riley, Kansas. Louis welcomed the trip, because it gave him a chance to stop off en route and see Marva. But their visit had to be brief. Joe had more time to spend with her in late August, when he came home on a five-day furlough. It was then that the Louises

announced they expected to become parents early in 1943. Both of them hoped that the baby that was to come would bring stability to their marriage, for it did not appear that Joe would be able to stay home for some time. The army would be his boss for an indeterminate number of months, and after that if he still were young enough, he would probably engage in a few more fights, to capitalize on his boxing ability as long as it was with him.

Joe did well enough at soldiering so that in September he was promoted to the rank of sergeant. But he was so poor a man with a needle and thread that several days went by before he managed to sew a third stripe to the sleeve of his uniform. The stripe was firmly in place, however, when a smiling, excited Louis learned, February 8, that he was a father. Louis had received orders to report to Burbank, California, to take over a role in the motion picture, *This Is the Army*. He would have just time enough before leaving for Burbank to go to Chicago and see Marva and the baby, a seven-pound girl. They were in Provident Hospital.

Joe found Marva in excellent health and spirits. It took the Louises very little time to name their offspring. They had decided before the baby's arrival that, regardless of its sex, it must be named after Jack Blackburn. They called the little girl Jacqueline. Joe, after talking with his wife, asked her physician, Dr. W. W. Gibbs, to take him to see Jacqueline. Joe looked at his daughter through a glass

partition. He saw a tiny infant, whose skin was several shades lighter than his, blinking at him. "Kitchykool!" said the delighted champion, waving at the baby. Dr. Gibbs smiled as the excited father chattered, forgetting his customary restraint. "Say, do you reckon she can see me?" asked Joe. "She's so little. But she's awfully cute." Joe grinned at Jacqueline and waved again to her. "She's got a scratch on her face already," he said. "I'd better buy her some gloves." Dr. Gibbs said he "reckoned" Jacqueline saw her father all right. And he told the champion not to worry about the scratch.

On May 31st, Joe finished his work in *This Is the Army*. "I can't act," he said. "But I done the best I could. Hope it wasn't too bad." Shortly after making this statement Joe was asked to visit Washington and confer with War Department officials. There he learned that he was going to be allowed to do what he had wanted to do for a long time—make an extensive tour of army bases in this country and abroad. The tour was to be under the Army Special Services Division and was designed to reach millions of soldiers. Nothing could have made Louis happier. He and War Department officials decided that Joe should appear with a troupe of boxers, including some of the best men in the lighter divisions. They would not only box, but would visit hospitals, talk with as many men as possible, try in every way they could to boost morale.

Joe's troupe began late in August to tour United

States Army bases. As they went along, they worked up a vaudeville act, in which Louis took a "ribbing" about the first Schmeling fight and his knockdown at the hands of Tony Galento. This act was to be given for thousands of wounded men in posts the troupe visited. After Joe had been on the road four weeks, the War Department announced that this troupe had been seen by 150,000 men. By January, 1944, when they were in New York completing plans to sail for Europe, they had made 111 appearances before more than a million soldiers.

Joe and Marva posed together for a newspaper photographer shortly before Joe went abroad. But Louis admitted that it was "just a pose." He had agreed to the picture, he said, to help Marva gain publicity for a singing tour she was about to launch. He said he and his wife had been separated six months. Joe had told Marva that if, after his return from Europe, she wanted to get a divorce, he would not stand in her way. Marva was to take him at his word. For after Louis had returned to this country she sued again, charging desertion, and was granted a divorce March 27, 1945. She felt that she had failed to find the continuity she had expected from married life with her boxer-husband, whose profession had kept him away a large percentage of the time when he was a civilian, and whose soldiering duties had kept him away even more since he had joined the army. The Louises parted friends. When Joe was overseas he wrote Marva every seven or eight

days, and once sent an officer friend, who was returning to the United States, to see her and tell her news of her husband. In the divorce settlement he arranged for the establishment of a \$10,000 educational policy for Jacqueline, so that his daughter would have the advantage which he most regretted not having had.

The trip to England was, to Joe, very wonderful. He had always wanted to travel. Now the army was seeing that he did. When he arrived in London he received a very friendly greeting from English journalists, who were impressed by his modesty. The story of Louis' arrival in London shared with the war news the front pages of the city's evening papers. Joe had shuffled, unannounced, into the office of Colonel Jack Lawrence, Public Relations Officer of the E.T.O., to put himself at the Colonel's disposal. The Colonel soon learned that although it was late afternoon, the champion had not eaten since breakfast. He therefore provided Joe with sandwiches. Between mouthfuls Louis talked about London enthusiastically. Asked what he wanted to do first, he said he was anxious to see "that big church you hear so much about."

Joe survived twelve successive nights of buzz bombing in London. From May to October he toured the European and North African areas, living on C-rations and K-rations. He often visited the front lines. Once, in Italy, he was allowed to pull the lanyard of a big gun. The next day the same gun

blew up, killing several men near it. Joe had several such narrow escapes. Behind the lines, he visited a great many hospitals. He later told reporters, "You don't talk much about things like what you see in hospitals. But you guys who write so much about courage in boxing—you don't know about courage. I know about it now. Those fellows got it, over there."

Some of the most striking incidents that occurred during Joe's tour were never recounted to reporters by the champion. But Private Tom Ephrem, correspondent for *Ring* magazine, learned of them and wrote them to the *Ring* from somewhere in the Mediterranean combat zone. Private Ephrem said that upon one occasion the champion and Captain Fred V. Maly, the officer in charge of his tour, arrived at an English airfield in time to see a bomber coming in for a landing. The plane was badly shot up. Only two engines were operating. Just as it reached the end of the field, it crashed. Louis and Captain Maly ran to the ship. Joe, arriving first, found that all but three of the crew members were dead. He placed the head of one of the wounded men on his knees, awaiting medical aid. Before long the airman's eyes opened. He took a long look at the champion. His face burst into a grin. "Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed delightedly. "It's Joe Louis!" Ephrem declared that the wounded man forgot entirely about his wounds while he talked to Joe.

The setting for another of Ephrem's stories also

was England. Joe visited a hospital just across the channel from France. When he appeared the inmates gave him a rousing cheer. A boy from Tennessee whose eyes were bandaged asked a buddy what all the noise was about. "Joe Louis is here," came the response.

The Tennessean's voice became pleading. "I want to see Joe," he said. "Have them take the bandages off so I can see Joe."

A doctor overheard the boy, and told him gently, "I'm sorry, son, but we just can't do it. Your eyes are very weak. If we took off the bandages we'd endanger your sight."

The boy remained unconvinced. "But, sir," he said, "it would do me so much good just to look at him. For a minute."

The doctor conferred with a fellow surgeon. Then he began gently to remove the gauze. A nurse stood near by. As soon as the bandages were off she put drops in the soldier's eyes so that he could keep them open for a while. When the big figure of the champion appeared before him, he held out his hand with a cry of joy. Joe grasped it. "This," said the soldier, "is the happiest I've ever been." If he was able to distinguish the tears that wet the champion's face, he didn't mention them.

Louis returned to the United States October 10, 1944. Reporters who asked him about his boxing plans were told, "I don't know. I'm thirty, and that's

pretty old for a boxer. But somehow, it don't seem to me it makes much difference if I fight again or not. This war's such a big thing—you can't think of yourself now."

Joe has not been thinking of himself. He has been putting all his energy into the athletic programs he has helped to build up and direct, under the supervision of the New York Port of Embarkation, for boys who are about to be shipped overseas. "It's a little bit like training boxers," Joe says. "I tell them some of the things Chappie Blackburn used to tell me: I tell them to fight to win, but not forget what they're fighting for. I tell them even if the whole world looks dirty, to stay clean and right themselves, because you can do that in a war, like in a ring. I'm not awful smart, but I learned some lessons on the way up. I tell them what I can that I figure might help."

Whether Joe will fight until he loses his title; whether he will retire undefeated in the fashion of Gene Tunney; whether, finally, boxing history will record him as the greatest of all pugilists—these are questions for the boxing fan to ponder.

But one phase of the Louis career has been chronicled so surely and unswervingly that little question can be attached to it. This has been his career as an "ambassador." Joe's accomplishments in causing good feeling between the white and Negro races are established facts. It is these, more than his accom-



plishments in the ring, that Joe would have people remember.

Because the former ragged, barefooted Alabama cotton picker thinks they are more important.













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